

# AN ANALYSIS OF BACK-CHANNELS IN JAPANESE

A thesis submitted for the partial fulfilment of the  
Degree of Master of Arts (Applied Japanese Linguistics)

by

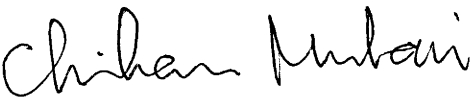
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Unless otherwise acknowledged in the text, this is the original work of the author.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Chiharu Mukai". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chiharu" and the last name "Mukai" written in a single line.

Chiharu Mukai

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ANU	the Australian National University
BC	back-channel
C	conversation
Cop	copula
CTRP	complex transition relevance place
df	degree of freedom
FP	final particle
Gen	genitive case
N	native speaker conversing with learner
Nom	nominative case
NS	native speaker conversing with native speaker
Obj	object marker
p	probability level
Q	question marker
QT	quotative marker
rep	repeated
Sub	subject marker
Tag	tag-question-like expression
Top	topic marker
TCU	turn-constructional unit
TRP	transition-relevance place

## TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

[      ]	Overlapping. The point of onset is marked with left hand brackets, and the point at which overlap stops is marked with right hand square brackets.
=	Latched. Contiguous stretches of talk between which there is no gap and no overlap.
(.)	Intervals within and between utterances are indicated by dots placed within curved brackets. Single dot indicates very short pause. Double dots indicate a short pause, three a longer, and four a very long pause.
.	A falling terminal contour.
,	A continuing contour.
?	A rising contour.
<u>words</u>	Stress is indicated by underlining.
:	Drawl or the lengthening of a sound.
↑↓	A particularly marked shift in pitch.
°words°	A softer talk than the surrounding talk.
°°words°°	A very quiet talk.
-	An abrupt cutoff. This also represents a glottal stop.
hh	Audible aspirations.
.hh	Audible inhalations.

>words<	A faster talk than its surrounding talk.
<words>	A slow talk.
\$words\$	Laughing while talking.
(        )	An uncertain hearing of the talk.
((        ))	Vocalisations that cannot be satisfactory transcribed, or references to other contextual features are indicated within double parentheses.
→	A feature of interest referred to in a text can be highlighted by a right pointing arrow.

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## **ABSTRACT**

In a conversation, the role of the listener is not simply to listen. The listener produces brief vocalisations, such as ‘uh huh’ or ‘yeah’ in English and ‘un’ or ‘hai’ in Japanese. These brief vocalisations that allow the listener to show his or her attention to, or understanding of the speaker’s talk, are commonly called “back-channels” (BCs). These brief responses from the listener are of great communicative importance in the process of conversation.

The ways in which BCs are used vary across cultures and speech communities. It is often pointed out that learners’ inappropriate usage of BCs provides native speakers with the negative impression on learners’ attitude toward the conversation. Teaching proper use of BCs to learners is an important issue in Japanese spoken language teaching.

The main aims of this study are to investigate the BC usage by advanced learners and native speakers of Japanese in actual conversation, and to obtain implications for teaching Japanese BCs. The usage of BCs will be analysed in terms of frequency, location, form, and function.



The organisation of this study is as following. In Chapter One, an overview of the characteristics of BCs and review of studies on the use of BCs are presented. The importance of teaching BCs to language learners is also discussed in relation to the interactional and cultural aspects of BCs. Chapter Two explains the detail of the conversational data in this study. Identification of BCs is also discussed in detail in this chapter. From Chapter Three to Chapter Six, BCs produced by advanced learners and native speakers are analysed in terms of their frequency, location, form, and function. The analyses reveal significant differences in the formal and functional aspects of BC usage between learners and native speakers. That is, learners use less variety of BCs, and do not express attitude toward what the speaker said as much as do native speakers when producing BCs. There are no great differences observed in frequency and location of BC usage. Finally, on the basis of the findings, some suggestions for teaching BCs to learners of Japanese are presented in Chapter Seven.

# INTRODUCTION

## 0.1. BACKGROUND

In a conversation, the listener gives brief feedback to the speaker's message, such as 'yeah' or 'uh huh' in the case of English, 'un' or 'hai' in Japanese. Such brief feedback is often referred to as a "back-channel" (BC), adopted from "backchannel communication" proposed by Yngve (1970). The BC behaviour is one of the most important behaviour of the listener in the process of conversation. BCs provide the speaker with immediate reactions to the speaker's talk. Therefore, BCs are useful for the speaker to monitor the situation of a conversation. If the speaker does not receive a BC from the listener, the speaker will be uncertain whether or not communication is maintained.

It is generally recognised that Japanese conversation contains frequent BCs and that BCs are essential for a smooth conversation. Therefore, as is often claimed, low frequent use of BCs by a learner provides native speakers with the negative impression on the learner's attitude toward the conversation. The BC behaviour is

recognised as one of the issues which are greatly concerned in the field of teaching and learning spoken Japanese language.

## **0.2. AIMS AND ORGANISATION OF THIS STUDY**

The main aim of this study is to investigate how learners of Japanese use BCs, one of the most important conversational devices, in actual conversations. The focus will be on advanced learners of Japanese in informal conversational settings. Two types of conversations will be analysed : one between a learner and a native speaker and another between native speakers. The selection of these two types is made in order to compare BCs used by native speakers and learners of Japanese and investigate whether or not there are any differences in their BC usage. The usage of BCs by learners and by native speakers will be compared in terms of frequency, location, form, and function. Furthermore, some implications for teaching BC will be discussed based on the findings of the analysis.

This study consists of seven chapters. In Chapter One, an overview of the characteristics of BCs and review of studies on the use of BCs are presented. The importance of teaching BCs to language learners is also discussed in relation to the interactional and cultural aspects of BCs. Chapter Two explains the detail of the conversational data in this study. Identification of BCs is also discussed in detail in

this chapter. From Chapter Three to Chapter Six, BCs produced by advanced learners and native speakers are analysed in terms of their frequency, location, form, and function. Finally, on the basis of the findings of the analysis, some implications for teaching BCs to learners of Japanese are suggested in Chapter Seven.

The modified Hepburn system of romanisation is adopted in this thesis, except that *fu* is spelled *hu*. Mora nasal is represented as *n'* and long vowels are written in double letters such as *aa*, *ii*.

## **Chapter 1**

# **BACK-CHANNEL BEHAVIOUR**

### **1.0. INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter One, I will outline some general aspects of BCs, which will be elaborated on further in the thesis. First, I will consider some characteristics of BC behaviour including functional, formal, interactional, and cultural aspects. In Section 1.2, I will consider some important points with respect to the teaching of Japanese BCs to foreign learners. Section 1.3 and 1.4 will be devoted to discussions of the use of BCs by Japanese native speakers and by learners of Japanese, respectively.

## **1.1. OVERVIEW OF THE BACK-CHANNEL BEHAVIOUR**

It is relatively recent that the contribution of the listener to a conversation has become a topic of investigation. Yngve (1970) introduced the term “back-channel communication” in his discussion on “short messages”, such as ‘yes’ and ‘uh huh’, which a person who has the speaking turn receives without relinquishing his or her speaking turn. Even before Yngve proposed the term “backchannel communication”, those vocalisations produced by the listener were already identified by other researchers like Fries (1952) and Kendon (1967). Fries groups such vocalisations as ‘yes’, ‘uh huh’, ‘I see’, ‘good’, ‘oh’, etc. together, and noted them as signalling to the speaker the continued attention of the listener. Kendon calls such behaviour “accompaniment signals”.

### **1.1.1. Functional and Formal Aspects of Back-Channels**

What is crucial in characterising a BC is that the BC itself does not claim or constitute a speaking turn (Yngve 1970; Duncan 1974; Oreström 1983; Clancy et al. 1996; and others). As Oreström (1983:24) notes, while a speaking turn would imply ‘I talk, you listen’, producing a BC would mean the opposite, ‘I listen, you talk’.

Functional and formal aspects are also often referred to in characterising a BC. There are three main viewpoints on the function of BCs. Firstly, a BC is the signal of the listener's attention to, understanding of, and/or interest in the speaker's talk (see for example, Fries 1952; Kendon 1967). Oreström (1983:104) describes a BC as a brief, spontaneous reaction of the listener to the content of the speaker's turn, which signals continued attention, agreement, and various emotional reactions. A BC indicates that the communicative contact is maintained between the listener and the speaker (Oreström 1983). Secondly, a BC allows a conversation to proceed smoothly. Duncan & Fiske (1977) note that a BC “. . . appears to provide the auditor with a means for participating actively in the conversation, thus facilitating the general coordination of action by both participants” (pp.202-203). Finally, a BC functions as a “continuer” (Schegloff 1982). Schegloff (1982) claims that discourse should be treated as an achievement which is interactional and accomplished incrementally. Based on such a perspective, Schegloff criticises many studies treating what a recipient produced in isolation from the speaker's talk to which the recipient behaviour is responding (for example, Kendon 1967; Yngve 1970). Schegloff analyses the recipient behaviour in relation to the local sequential context where it occurs. Schegloff, on the basis of this analysis, suggests two characterisations for these vocalisations produced by the recipient, e.g. ‘uh huh’: (i) usage as a continuer, and (ii) usage to pass an opportunity to initiate repair. The ‘continuer’ exhibits the listener's understanding that the speaker's turn is still in progress, thus shows the listener's understanding that the speaker should continue talking. As for usage of the latter,

according to Schegloff, the listener passes opportunities to initiate repair of understanding by producing ‘uh huh’ and others. As a result, ‘uh huh’ and the like are taken as an indication of the absence of problems of understanding. Schegloff, therefore, notes the ‘uh huh’ itself does not have a direct semantic meaning of claiming understanding.

As for the formal aspects of a BC, there is a group of brief expressions which are often represented by ‘uh huh’, ‘yeah’ and other similar expressions. These are recognised as a type of BC in most studies. This group consists of a variety of expressions. Duncan (1974) and Duncan & Fiske (1977) represent the group made-up with these expressions as ‘m-hm’. In Japanese, a group of BCs called “*aizuchi-shi*” (Horiguchi 1988; Matsuda 1988) appears to correspond to this group. *Aizuchi-shi* consists of items that belong to various grammatical groups, such as *kandooshi*, ‘interjections’, *keiyooshi* ‘adjectives’, *hukushi* ‘adverbs’, etc. In addition to these expressions, several types of behaviour are identified as a BC. Repetition of a part or the whole of the speaker’s utterance is one of such behaviour. A “brief restatement” (Duncan 1974:166) refers to the listener’s restatement, accomplished in a few words, of an immediately preceding message of the speaker. There are two other types of BCs: a brief request for clarification (Duncan 1974), and a behaviour called “sentence completion” (Duncan 1974; Oreström 1983; White 1989) or “collaborative finishes” (Clancy et al. 1996), which refers to the listener completing a sentence that the speaker had begun.



While the aforementioned studies cover a relatively wide range of verbal forms as BC and treat them as a whole, other studies focus more on distinguishing the individual members. For example, Jefferson (1984) notes the functional distinctions between ‘yeah’ and ‘uh huh’, and their systematic deployment in conversational sequence. Goodwin (1986) observes brief vocalisations which are produced by recipients in the midst of the speaker’s extended turn, and draws a distinction between “continuers” and “assessments”. Assessments refer to expressions such as ‘wow’ or ‘good’, which assess what has been said by treating the utterance as something remarkable. Such distinction is supported by Goodwin’s close observation that continuers and assessments occur in slightly different places. It is further reported that continuers and assessments are treated differently by the participants in a conversation (Goodwin 1986).

It is not only verbal behaviours that are recognised as a type of BC behaviour. There are some non-verbal behaviour which are considered to serve as a BC, such as head nods (Duncan 1974; Duncan & Fiske 1977; Maynard 1986, 1989, 1997a; Sugito 1988; and others), facial expression (Matsuda 1988), laughter (Maynard 1986, 1989, 1997a), etc. Duncan (1974) closely observes the behaviour of the speaker and auditor during face-to-face conversations in relation to body motions such as gesticulations and head movements. Duncan claims that there is regularity in the display of the auditor’s BC behaviour and the speaker’s certain behaviour during interaction. It is generally recognised that non-verbal BCs are as important as verbal BCs. However,

the number of empirical studies on non-verbal BCs, especially those excluding head nods, is not as many as those on verbal BCs.

There is disagreement as to whether or not certain types of behaviour are accepted as a BC. This is due to the aforementioned characteristics of BCs, namely: a BC does not constitute a speaking turn. As noted earlier, most researchers agree that brief vocalisations such as 'uh huh' do not constitute speaking turns, and therefore recognised as BCs. As for restatement or sentence completions, however, it is uncertain whether or not they constitute speaking turns. A request for clarification is also an example of behaviour the characterisation of which is problematic. Oreström (1983) regards it as a speaking turn rather than a BC, claiming that a request for clarification is close to ordinary question/answer paired turns. In contrast, there are some researchers who accept a wider range of behaviour as BCs. For example, Yngve (1970) accepts short comments and questions as BCs. Duncan (1974) includes sentence completions, requests for clarifications, brief restatements, and head nods and shakes as BCs. In general, the longer an utterance, the more difficult it is to determine whether it is a BC or a speaking turn.

### **1.1.2. The Back-Channel as an Interactional Device**

A conversation generally involves at least two participants: one who assumes the role of speaker and the other as the listener. The speaker and the listener are likely to be contrasted as active and passive, or primary and secondary. A conversation is not organised only by the speech of the speaker which is produced based simply on his or her intention or plan, rather it is interactional. The speaker and the listener are expected to respond to each other, and develop a conversation by constantly adjusting as direction in accordance with responses. During a conversation, the listener's BC serves as useful information for the speaker, especially in assessing the situation of talk. As Duncan & Fiske (1977) note, a BC enables listeners to become actively involved in conversational interactions.

Even though the listener does not produce substantial utterances like the speaker, the listener's contribution to the development of the conversation is as important as that of the speaker. BCs have a relatively high value on the level of communication (Oreström 1983:24).

Such an interactive process of conversation is grouped under a general principle known as "recipient design" (Sacks et al 1974). According to Sacks et al, recipient design refers to "a multitude of respects in which the talk by a party in a conversation is constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and

sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are the co-participants” (Sacks et al. 1974:727).

In summary, the BC is an interactional device which is used by the listener and plays a crucial role in the process of conversational development.

### **1.1.3. The Back-Channel as a Cultural Specific Device**

BCs can be observed in any language. To this extent, Goffman (1976) regards BC behaviour as one of the prime prerequisites for communication<sup>1</sup>. However, the style and expectation of the usage of BCs varies among social, cultural and linguistic groups (Hatch & Long 1980). Thus, a BC is characterised, on the one hand, as a universal behaviour, and on the other hand, as a culturally specific device (Crozet 1996; Hatch 1983; Maynard 1997a; McCarthy 1994; Slade & Gardner 1985; White 1989).

The style of BCs used in a language is often discussed in relation to the cultural background of the community where that language is used. For example, frequent BC

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<sup>1</sup> Goffman (1976) proposes a series of prerequisites for communication such as two-way acoustically adequate and interpretable messages, back-channel feedback, contact signals, turnover signals, preempt signals, etc. See Goffman (1976) for details.

use in Japanese conversation has been reported in a number of studies (Clancy et al. 1996; LoCastro 1987; Maynard 1986, 1989; and others). Maynard (1989:177) says that a “continuous flow of back channel facilitates conversation management between Japanese speakers and listeners, and this continuous feedback in casual conversation is the norm within the Japanese speech community”. Such frequent use of BCs in Japanese is often considered to reflect an aspect of Japanese culture which values maintaining smooth and harmonious social interaction (LoCastro 1987; Maynard 1986; White 1989; and others). BCs are considered to be crucial in Japanese conversation as a way of the listener showing a concern for interactional support and cooperation toward the conversational partner. Japanese interactional style is based on the “constant awareness of placing oneself in the context of the other” (Maynard 1997a) or on a sensitivity toward “self-contextualization” (Maynard 1989). According to Maynard (1989, 1997a), BCs provide a type of information which is important for the process of self-contextualization in Japanese conversation.

In the cross-cultural communication context, differences in interactional styles can be problematic, especially in the case of BCs, where there are similar devices in both languages but the usage is different. Studies on the use of BCs in cross-cultural settings report that speakers of Japanese produce BCs frequently even when they are talking with speakers of English in English (Maynard 1997a; White 1989). This suggests that the conversational style of one’s native language transfers across cultural boundaries (Maynard 1997a, White 1989). It is often claimed that the danger

of misunderstandings or negative evaluations of the participants' personality increases if interactional conventions are not shared and conversational participants are unaware of such differences.

For example, Lebra (1976:39) notes that Americans would take the frequent BC interjections produced by a Japanese listener as "a sign of the listener's impatience and demand for a quick completion of the statement". Similarly, Mizutani (1982) says that non-Japanese speakers could possibly be disturbed by the frequent use of BCs by a Japanese listener, but at the same time, they perplex Japanese speakers by failing to produce frequent BCs<sup>2</sup>. If difference in interactional styles leads to negative results, as is often claimed, such differences in the styles of BC usage should be highlighted in cross-cultural contexts.

## **1.2. TEACHING BACK-CHANNELS TO LEARNERS OF JAPANESE**

In Section 1.2, I will discuss the importance of teaching BCs to Japanese language learners with respect to interactional and cultural aspects of BC usage.

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<sup>2</sup> White (1989) argues against the view by providing results of the study on conversation spoken in English in cross-cultural settings. According to White, the frequent BCs used by Japanese listeners are perceived as positively by Americans as being more patient, polite, and attentive.

If a learner possesses a high standard of competence in linguistic aspects of the target language, e.g. vocabulary and grammar, he or she may be regarded as being competent in the language. However, it is not necessarily the case that this always means that he or she is a competent ‘user’ of the language. In particular, competence at speaking a language further requires the ability to use the norms of interaction which are accepted socially and culturally in the target language (Crozet 1996).

As communicative aspects in language learning has received more attention in recent decades, the issue of teaching communication oriented devices, such as BCs, has become a great concern of language teachers. It is commonly recognised that BCs play one of the most important roles in Japanese conversation. Based on this recognition, effective teaching of appropriate BC usage is understood as an important issue in the field of teaching Japanese as a foreign language (Horiguchi 1988; Matsuda 1988; Mizutani 1983, 1984, 1988b; among others).

### **1.2.1. Importance of Teaching Back-Channels and its Interactional Aspect**

Conversational interaction is accomplished in such a way that it creates and recreates the social relationships between the participants (Liddicoat 1997). In a conversation in the target language, learners are expected to participate in actual interaction and cooperate with other participants as a user of the language. A conversation is the

product of the collaborative work of both the speaker and the listener (Goodwin 1986). Learners need to be able to play the roles of both 'speaker' and 'listener' in communication outside the classroom. However, in both language teaching and linguistic studies, the speaker's productive aspect in conversation tends to be more focused on than the role of the listener. The role of the listener, as mentioned above, is commonly perceived as passive. The speaker is treated as the main participant of a conversation and the listener as secondary. In fact, as discussed in 1.1.2, the listener contributes greatly to the development of the speaker's talk. The listener's BCs are crucial for interaction between the participants in conversation. The listener does not simply listen to the speaker's message and comprehend the content. Rather, whilst listening and comprehending, the listener also needs to respond and give feedback to the speaker's message by producing BCs. Such feedback is expected by the speaker in order to assess the "immediate situation in conversation" (Maynard 1989) and to determine whether to continue or change the course of their talk. While, for learners, to merely understand the content and situation of the conversation may be a burden, they are also expected to give BCs in an appropriate manner as anticipated in the target language. Therefore, practice is a necessary requirement for learners to become good 'listeners'.



### **1.2.2. Importance of Teaching Back-Channels and its Cultural Aspect**

Language is closely related to and reflects the culture where it is used. The crucial role of culture in second or foreign language learning is pointed out by a number of researchers (Maynard 1997a; McCarthy 1994; Slade & Gardner 1985; White 1989; and others). As mentioned in 1.1.3, communication breakdowns tend to occur in cross-cultural settings. Slade & Gardner (1985) notes that a lack of cultural and contextual knowledge as well as grammatical knowledge of the target language often causes breakdowns or misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. Misunderstandings also arise due to the difference in expectations of the conversational managing conventions or the ways in which people communicate (Maynard 1997a, Slade & Gardner 1985).

As was noted in 1.1.3, BC behaviour is a universal behaviour observable in all languages. However, the BC is at the same time a culturally specific device in the sense that the way in which it is used differs among cultures and speech communities. Therefore, if learners are unaware of the differences in BC usage, learners may use BCs in the same way as BCs are used in their own language. Considering the fact that the BC is a universal behaviour which exists in any language, it is likely to be more difficult for learners to recognise the differences in BC usage between their target and native language.

In relation to language education, the usage of BCs in the target language needs to be acknowledged and made clear to learners. Possible communicative misunderstandings due to the learners' ignorance of the differences in the use of BCs between their native and target languages should be prevented. It is important to raise the awareness of language learners to the role of BCs and to the appropriate use of BCs in varying contexts (Slade & Gardner 1985). This is particularly significant in Japanese language teaching as BCs are frequently used and play a very important role in Japanese conversation.

When learners are conversing in the target language with native speakers of the language, they may be expected to manage a conversation in a manner equivalent to that of native speakers. Native speakers may think that learners can do this naturally. Native speakers may not even notice that there are differences in interactional styles between the learner's native language and the target language. It is, therefore, likely that there is a gap between the native speaker's expectation and the way in which learners actually perform in conversation. Such difference can result in a serious problem, especially in the case of advanced learners. The high standard in the grammatical and syntactical knowledge of advance learners may lead native speakers to expect a high standard in the non-linguistic or interactional aspects of communication as well. With regard to this, Maynard (1997a:55) says that "the more competent the speaker is in phonological, lexical, and grammatical aspects of the language, the more vulnerable the speaker becomes when he or she uses different

interactional management styles”. Further, White (1989) notes that negative feelings caused by misunderstandings between fluent speakers are likely to be attributed to the personality of participant(s) rather than to linguistic skills. There is a tendency in language courses for advanced learners to focus more on developing reading and writing skills than spoken skills. Again, being competent in the linguistic aspects of the target language is not sufficient for learners to be successful users of the language in actual communication. Therefore, advanced learners also need to learn the spoken aspect of the target language, particularly conversational devices such as BCs.

### **1.3. THE USE OF BACK-CHANNELS BY NATIVE JAPANESE SPEAKERS**

In Japanese, BCs are commonly referred to as ‘*aizuchi*’. A number of studies have been conducted on the use of BCs in Japanese conversation. Some studies investigate the use of BCs in Japanese with the intention of obtaining the pedagogical implications for Japanese language teaching (Horiguchi 1988; Komiya 1986; Matsuda 1988; Mizutani 1984; and others). Others aim to investigate the nature of BC itself (Kurosaki 1987; Sugito 1988; Sugitoo 1993; and others). In 1.3, I will summarise the use of BCs by native Japanese speakers from the findings of various researchers.

Kurosaki (1987) observes conversations between people who speak Takino dialect in Japan, and reports that there are generational and sex differences observed in the use of BCs. Kurosaki notes that, generally, females tend to produce BCs more frequently than males and that the older generation have a tendency to use BCs frequently. Regarding the timing of BCs, it is reported that BCs tend to be produced in response to certain sentence final particles appearing in the speaker's talk (Kurosaki 1987). Sugito (1988) observes the relationship between verbal and non-verbal BCs in Japanese. According to Sugito, the rate of head nods which accompany verbal BCs are similar among participants. Sugito also reports that the ratio of BC behaviour to the non-BC behaviour in conversations is similar in cases of both verbal and non-verbal behaviour. That is, those who produce verbal BCs at high frequency also display non-verbal BCs at a high rate.

In addition to these studies, there are contrastive studies on BCs, which compare the use of BCs in the conversations of native speakers of Japanese with the usage of BCs in conversations of native speakers of other languages (for example, Clancy et al. 1996; Maynard 1986).

Regarding the frequency of BCs, as mentioned earlier, Japanese conversation contains frequent usage of BCs. Maynard (1986) and Clancy et al. (1996) point out that there is a higher occurrence of BCs in Japanese conversation compared to English conversation. In contrast to the frequent use of BCs in Japanese, some studies report

a low usage rate of BCs in Chinese conversation (Clancy et al. 1996; Liu 1987; Mizuno 1988).

Contrastive studies on BCs also reveal differences in the context where BCs occur among different languages (Clancy et al. 1996; Maynard 1986). Referring to BC usage in Mandarin, Clancy et al. report that fewer BCs are observed in the middle of clauses, further noting that BCs in Mandarin tend to be more lexically contentful than in Japanese. According to Clancy et al., in conversations in Mandarin, avoiding the of BCs during the speaker's turn shows respect for the speaker's right to formulate his or her talk undisturbed. In contrast, in Japanese conversation, it is reported that the listener tends to produce BCs while the speaker's talk is still in progress, rather than waiting until the speaker's talk is complete (Clancy et al. 1996). There appears to be a relationship between the tendency of producing BC in the middle of speaker's talk and the frequent use of BC in Japanese. As for English conversation, a BC is more likely to be produced at a point where the speaker's talk is grammatically significant, such as at the end of a clause or a sentence (Maynard 1986; Clancy et al. 1996). Clancy et al. note American listeners, compared to Japanese listeners, are more likely to refrain themselves from infringing on the speakers' on-going formulation of their talk.

In general, contrastive analyses on BCs reveal that there are differences in the use of BCs, especially in frequency and location among languages.

There is another type of study that investigates BC usage by Japanese listeners. These studies examine the use of BC in cross-cultural settings where Japanese speakers speak with English speakers in English.

Maynard (1997a) and White (1989) observe BCs produced in conversations in English between a native speaker of Japanese and a American English speaker. Maynard and White report that Japanese listeners use BCs more frequently than American listeners. Comparing BCs used by Japanese listeners in cross-cultural and in intra-cultural context, both Maynard and White claim that the Japanese interactional style in terms of BC usage does not change even in cross-cultural settings<sup>3</sup>. In contrast to this finding, Americans, who are referred to as native speakers in the study, demonstrate a rather drastic increase in frequency of BCs from intra- to cross-cultural conversations (White 1989). That is, American listeners' styles of usage of BCs changed when they spoke to Japanese interlocutors.

It is often claimed that BCs do not appear randomly, but they appear in a certain environment. Maynard (1997a) reports a difference in the placement of BCs produced by Japanese listeners and English listeners in cross-cultural conversations. According to Maynard, Japanese listeners often use BCs during a brief pause as well as in places where no recognisable pauses are observed. As noted earlier, in English conversation, listeners provide BCs at grammatically significant breaks, such as at the

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<sup>3</sup> In White (1989), the conversations between native speakers of Japanese are in English. In Maynard (1997a) native speakers of Japanese are talking in Japanese.

end of a clause or at a sentence-final position. The placement of BCs by Japanese speakers appears to be maintained even in the cross-cultural context.

In summary, studies on the usage of BCs by native speakers of Japanese, in Japanese or English conversations, show that Japanese listeners display BCs significantly more frequently than speakers of other languages, such as English (Clancy et al. 1996; Maynard 1986, 1997a; White 1989) and Chinese (Clancy et al. 1996). Maynard (1989) points out that the Japanese language itself and the manner in which people use the language, such as final particles, create moments suitable for the input of BCs.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will review studies which are relevant to this study, specifically with respect to the use of BCs by learners of the Japanese language.

#### **1.4. THE USE OF BACK-CHANNELS BY LEARNERS OF JAPANESE**

In 1.4, I will consider previous studies on the use of BCs by learners of Japanese. A learner's use of BCs is often referred to as being problematic. There are some studies which examine BCs produced by learners of Japanese (Hata 1982; Horiguchi 1990; Matsuda 1988; Watanabe 1994).

Matsuda (1988) observes tape-recorded 30 five minute conversations between the researcher and a beginner learner. Matsuda reports that only six out of thirty beginner learners used verbal BCs, other than greetings on the weather. Matsuda also notes some examples of inappropriate usage of BCs observed in her collected conversations. Horiguchi (1990) observes the usage of BCs as well as other verbal behaviour of listeners in conversations between advanced learners undertaken in Japanese without any given topic. Horiguchi reports that the learners produced fewer BCs, with only one fifth in the case of native speakers. Watanabe (1994) examines the use of BCs by learners of three proficiency levels: beginner, intermediate and advanced. Watanabe observes interviews on the telephone between learners playing the role of interviewer and a native speaker acting as the interviewee. According to Watanabe, the frequency of BCs is not affected by the difference of the proficiency level or native language of learners. However, it is reported that there are certain tendencies to inappropriately use BCs due to differences in learners' levels and native languages. Watanabe also mentions some problematic usages of BCs observed regardless of these differences, such as the low frequent use of BC, the choice of inappropriate tokens and failing to use BCs where expected. Furthermore, the learner's small degree of variation of BCs used is also reported.

On the whole, learners are reported to not only use BCs inappropriately, but also to produce BCs less frequently and use fewer variations of BCs.



In contrast to these studies, Hata (1982) reports a case of proper use of BC by a learner of Japanese. Hata (1982) conducts a case study of an Australian called Maria. Hata examines a tape-recorded conversation between Maria and Hata speaking in Japanese. Although Maria's grammar and vocabulary are limited, she is perceived as a successful speaker of Japanese as she can use BCs properly. According to Hata, the timing, rather than the quantity and degree of variety, is important in the BC usage.

The number of studies on the usage of BCs by learners is not prolific compared to that of studies on the BC behaviour of native speakers. The discussion in 1.2. has revealed the importance and the necessity of teaching BCs to language learners. For an effective teaching of BCs, it is necessary to understand BC usage in Japanese conversation. Also, it is important to understand how learners actually use BCs in conversation. Understanding BC usage, by both native speakers and learners, will assist in obtaining implications for an effective teaching of BCs. It is generally claimed that many teaching materials are unnatural and not based on an analysis of language used in real life. Teaching materials should be developed to reflect language actually used. BCs are used in the process of interaction and are closely related to the context in which they are used. A suitable way of investigating the actual use of BCs is to observe actual conversations. It is clear that further empirical studies on the BC behaviour of learners are necessary.

## 1.5. SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have discussed the following issues with respect to BCs: (i) the characteristics of BC behaviour focusing mainly on functional, formal, interactional and cultural aspects of BCs, (ii) the importance of teaching BCs, and (iii) BC behaviour in Japanese and English conversation.

The BC is an interactional device which enables the listener to contribute to the process of conversational development. The BC, which functions to facilitate the flow of conversation, is a behaviour observed universally in any language. However, the usage of BCs varies across cultures and speech communities. Contrastive studies on the use of BCs report that BCs are more frequently used in Japanese conversation than in other languages such as English or Mandarin. Furthermore, the context where BCs are produced is reported to be different.

In Japanese language teaching, the necessity of teaching the proper usage of BCs to Japanese language learners is often emphasised. The importance of teaching BCs has been discussed in reference to the following two points: (i) the listener's contribution to the conversation, and (ii) the cultural differences in the interactional styles between languages. Teachers should raise the learners' awareness to the importance of BCs, to their differences in style, and then assist them to ensure appropriate usage.

Studies on the use of BCs by learners report that learners use BCs inappropriately. Furthermore, studies on learners' BCs reveal low frequency and fewer variety of learners' BCs. There are not as many studies on the use of BCs by learners compared to those studies on BCs used by native speakers of Japanese. More empirical studies on the usage of BCs by learners are necessary.

## **Chapter 2**

# **METHODS**

### **2.0. INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter Two, I will summarise the detail of the conversational data collected for this study in terms of the procedure of data collection and participants of conversations. After presenting details of data in Section 2.1, I will identify BCs used in the collected conversations, which are BC expressions, repetitions, cooperative completions, and head nods.

## **2.1. DATA**

To investigate the actual use of BCs by learners and native speakers, conversations in which they participate in will be analysed in this study. Conversations between pairs of a native Japanese speaker (N) and a learner of Japanese (L), and between native speakers (NSs) will be analysed. Five N-L and five NS-NS conversations by twenty participants (six males and fourteen females) were collected for analyses of this study. Details of the data are as follows.

### **2.1.1. Procedures of Data Collection**

The data for this study was collected in Canberra in May, 1997. In data collection, the instruction was given in such a way as to minimise the constraint from the investigator and to avoid artificial elicitation. Participants were instructed to have a conversation without any given topic. The conversational topic was not specified so that the participants were able to have a conversation under a less controlled environment, and therefore the conversational data would approximate the naturally occurring conversation. This appeared to cause confusion at first but participants seemed to be able to talk normally after a while. They were instructed to conduct a conversation until the investigator returned to the room. They were informed that the conversation would

be video-taped and audio-recorded. After starting a video camera and a tape recorder, the investigator departed the room and returned after approximately 30 minutes.

Each of the conversation lasted approximately 25-30 minutes. Fifteen minutes of each conversation was extracted for the analysis of the use of BCs, excluding the first five minutes and focusing on the following fifteen minutes of the conversation. This time frame was selected because the beginning of conversations were likely to be unnatural due to the participants' awareness of the recording. Furthermore, fifteen minute conversations provided an ample amount of BCs for this study.

The fifteen-minute segment of each tape-recorded conversation was transcribed for analysis based on the transcription symbols adopted from Gardner (1994) with some modifications<sup>4</sup>. Video-taped data was used for the analysis of non-verbal behaviour.

Examples of conversation taken from the collected data appear with conversation numbers, e.g. C1, C2, etc., at the end of examples. All examples are numbered.

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<sup>4</sup> Some difficulties are found in the process of transcription, especially when describing the sound of a non-lexical BC. There may be variations in the quality of the sound, such as intonation, even in the case of those which are described in the same way in the transcription manuscript. As there is the possibility of failure or loss in describing the actual sound in the transcription manuscript, efforts are made to minimise this problem by relying not only on the transcription but also using audio-tapes in the course of analysis.

**2.1.2. Participants**

Each conversation and participant will be referred to by a reference number, such as C1 (conversation 1), L1 (learner 1)<sup>5</sup>. The numbers assigned to the participants correspond to the number of conversations they participated in (Table 1a; 1b).

**Table 1a. Participants in N-L conversation**

<u>Conversation</u>	<u>Learners</u>	<u>Native speaker</u>
C1	L1 (Male)	N1 (Female)
C2	L2 (M)	N2 (M)
C3	L3 (F)	N3 (F)
C4	L4 (F)	N4 (F)
C5	L5 (F)	N5 (M)

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<sup>5</sup> Two different abbreviations, 'N' and 'NS', are used to distinguish those native speakers who conversed with learners and those with native speakers respectively.

**Table 1b. Participants in NS-NS conversation**

<u>Conversation</u>	<u>Native speaker</u>	<u>Native speaker</u>
C6	NS6a (F)	NS6b (F)
C7	NS7a (F)	NS7b (M)
C8	NS8a (F)	NS8b (M)
C9	NS9a (F)	NS9b (F)
C10	NS10a (F)	NS10b (M)

Ls are all native or near native speakers of English<sup>6</sup>. All Ls attended either or both of the two language units specifically designed for advanced learners of Japanese. These units were offered by the Australian National University (ANU) in the first semester, 1997. In one of these units, students are required to read contemporary Japanese texts on social, historical, ethnological, anthropological, and technological themes (cited from the course outline), and further to discuss the topics they have read. The other class focuses on developing competence in the modern spoken language, looking at the organisation of various genres of the modern spoken language (cited also from the course outline). All Ls are categorised as advanced learners of Japanese, though the period of study and environment may vary. Each L's background of learning Japanese is shown in Table 2.

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<sup>6</sup> One of the Ls came to Australia from Hong Kong when he was about 14 years old. According to him, his English and Cantonese proficiency are about the same.



**Table 2. Total length of formal instruction**

	<u>In Australia</u>	<u>In Japan</u>	<u>Total</u>
L1	5 years + 3 months	2 years	7 years + 3 months
L2	4 years + 3 months	1 year	5 years + 3 months
L3	4 years + 3 months	1 year	5 years + 3 months
L4	4 years	1 year	5 years
L5	3 months	1 year	1 year + 3 months

All Ls have been to Japan for at least one year to study or for employment purposes. Although their purpose and length of stay in Japan is different, there is one common trait among them: they all used Japanese in their daily routine in Japan. Furthermore, all Ls had formal instruction of Japanese language at Japanese universities for at least one year during their stay in Japan.

All the Ns in N-L conversations were students studying at the ANU, including exchange students from Japanese universities at the time of data collection. Their fields of study vary. All NSs in NS-NS conversation were studying at either the ANU or an English language school in Canberra at the time of data collection.

Some participants knew each other while others had no link at the time of data collection. As far as can be ascertained from the data collected, conversations appear not to have

many differences between those who were previously acquainted and those who were not. This is due to the fact that all participants are about the same age and were students, which allowed them the ease of chatting quite casually. All participants (5 Ls, 5 Ns and 10 NSs) were in their twenties.

## **2.2. IDENTIFICATION OF BACK-CHANNELS**

Prior to the analysis, BCs are identified in collected conversations. BCs are the behaviour of the listener, with which the listener informs the speaker that he or she is listening, has understood the talk, and/or how he or she feels about the speaker's talk. Utterances which consist of the speaking turns are not regarded as BCs. Among various behaviour of the listener, the following four behaviour are regarded as BCs in this study: (i) back-channel expressions, (ii) repetitions, (iii) cooperative completions, and (iv) head nods.

### 2.2.1. Back-Channel Expressions

BC expressions refer to a group of brief expressions that are called “*aizuchi-shi*” in Horiguchi (1988) and Matsuda (1988)<sup>7</sup>. This group of expressions is considered to correspond to the group of vocalisations in English termed ‘m-hm’ in Duncan (1974)<sup>8</sup>. This group includes “assessments” (Goodwin 1986) which evaluate or assess the speaker’s talk, such as ‘wow’ or ‘good’ in English.

These BC expressions are further divided into lexical and non-lexical BCs. The following are some examples of BC expressions observed in the collected conversations.

Lexical BC expressions: *honto*, *hontoni*, *sugoi*, *ii ne*, *sooka*, *soonanda*,  
*soodane*, *naruhodo*, *etc.*

Non-lexical BC expressions: *n:*, *aa*, *hee*, *huun*, *e::*, *hoo*, *etc.*

As Horiguchi (1988) notes, the use of these expressions vary greatly among individuals. Horiguchi also points out that even the same person may use different expressions depending on the conversational situations.

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<sup>7</sup> Horiguchi and Matsuda consider it is advantageous in Japanese language teaching to treat these expressions, i.e. BC expressions, as one group.

<sup>8</sup> Expressions being referred as the term ‘m-hm’ include ‘such expressions as ‘m-hm’, ‘yeah’, ‘right’, and the like’. Some other expression from Kendon (1967), such as ‘yes quite’, ‘I see’, etc. are also included (Duncan 1974).

### 2.2.2. Repetitions

The listener may repeat the utterance of the speaker fully or partially, as seen in the following example.

- (1)           L:     nanka     ooburii no mori ni koo sono wainarii ga  
                  something Albury Gen forests in       well winery Sub  
                  ip[pai atte:,               sore mo: (.)  
                  many there-are-and it     also  
                  ‘Well, there are many wineries in the forests of Albury, and they  
                  are also,’
- N:     [a honto ni  
                      ah really  
                      ‘Oh, really.’
- L:     yuumei desu [yo.  
                      famous Cop FP  
                      ‘famous.’
- N:                       [yuumei,  
                                      famous  
                                      ‘Famous.’

(C3)

The listener may not repeat the portion or the whole of the speaker’s talk in exactly the same way expressed by the speaker. In addition to simple repetition of this type as in the above example, this includes such repetitions that are repeated with additional

particles or other elements. In the following example, the listener is not only repeating the speaker's utterance but also adding a sentence-final particle, *ne*.

- (2) NSa: ato nanka pirahu toka tsukut[te,  
and something pilaf or make-and  
'And (I) cook pilaf or something, and'
- NSb: [hh aa pirahu [ne, °n :°  
ah pilaf FP uh huh  
'Ah, pilaf. Uh huh.'
- NSa: [n : .  
uh huh.  
'Uh huh.'
- (C9)

### 2.2.3. Cooperative Completions

If the listener completes a sentence the speaker had begun, it is referred to as cooperative completion. In the following example, L completes N's utterance.

- (3) L: demo: (.) nanka oosutorariajin to: shabet tara,=  
but something Australian with talk if  
'But if you talk to Australians,'  
N: =n : :  
uh huh

‘Uh huh.’

L: tto: (.) aite no eigo wa zenzen wakarimashita?  
well partner Gen English Top understood  
‘well, did you understand their English?’

(...)

N: a : : n (..) hutsuu no (.) nichijoo (.) kaiwa nara?  
well ordinary Gen every-day conversation if  
‘Well, if it’s everyday conversation,’

→ L: un. wakarimashi[ta  
yeah understood  
‘Yeah, (you) understood.’

[tada rekuchaa wa  
but lecture Top  
‘But as for the lecture,’

(C2)

There is a case where the cooperative completion made by the listener based on his or her assumption may result in different endings from those intended by the speaker. This case will also be recognised as a type of cooperative completion. This can be considered as a type of feedback displaying the listener’s understanding of the speaker’s talk at the time of production.

- (4) NSa: e dare ni, G ((name)) ni miseru ?  
eh who to G to show  
‘To whom? Do you show (your essays) to G?’  
NSb: sutadai su- kiruzu sen-

study-skills-cen(tre)  
 ‘The study skills cen(tre),’  
 → NSa: taa ni tanomu.  
 (cen)tre to ask  
 ‘You ask (the study skills cen)tre.  
 NSb: de totteta no ne,  
 at was-taking FP FP  
 ‘I was taking (a course) at (the study skills centre).’

(C10)

As is the case with repetitions, cooperative completion might be accomplished by adding some sentence-final particles, as seen in the example below.

(5) NSb: kitchin ni iku no ga [mendokusai.  
 kitchen to go Nom Sub troublesome  
 ‘It’s troublesome to go to the kitchen.’  
 → NSa: [mendokusai yo ne.=  
 troublesome FP FP  
 ‘It’s troublesome, isn’t it?’

(C9)

#### **2.2.4. Head Nods**

In face-to-face conversation, not only verbal behaviour but also non-verbal behaviour is considered to be crucial in the course of conversation. In this study, head nods are included for analysis. Head nods are frequently observed in collected conversational data and appear to have the same function as other verbal BCs, namely it indicates 'I am listening, so you may keep talking', etc. Head nods are relatively clear to observe compared to eye gaze or gesticulation in the collected data. Head nods refer to the vertical movement of the head, and appear to give useful information to the speaker to understand the situation of conversation as well as the verbal BCs. They may be used singly or may be accompanied by a verbal BC. Head nods can be single or continuous repeated nods. Some may last longer, which might cover even more than two different verbal BCs in a continuous succession of head nods. Some people have very obvious head movements and some less obvious. If a movement is too subtle to identify, it is excluded from the analysis. Needless to say, a head movement which is produced to indicate a positive answer to a question is also excluded.

Other non-verbal behaviour of the listener, such as eye-gaze or gesticulation, have been reported to be observed during conversation (Kendon 1967; Duncan & Fiske 1977). Laughter is also claimed to be recognised as a type of BCs by some researchers such as Matsuda (1988) and Maynard (1986, 1997a). Laughter is frequently observed also in the



data of the current study. However, these non-verbal behaviour will not be included in the analysis. This is by no means because these behaviour are considered less important. Rather, the objects of analysis are restricted to those which are observed relatively clearly in order to prevent a possible confusion rather than including various behavioural aspects of the listener as types of BCs. Furthermore, the conversational data for this study occasionally fail to provide comprehensive information for the analysis of non-verbal behaviour other than head nods.

#### **2.2.5. Back-Channel Turns and Back-Channel Tokens**

Each time when a BC is produced by the listener toward the speaker's talk, it is considered that the listener produce a BC turn. Some BC turns consist of single expression, such as *n*: 'uh huh' or *honto* 'really'. Some are made up with more than two expressions, such as *aa hontoni* 'oh, really' or *sokka sokka* 'I see, I see'. There are two subtypes in those which occur in combination of more than two expressions. The first subtype includes those produced in a repetition of identical forms such as *n*: *n*: *n*: 'hmm hmm hmm' or *sokka sokka* 'I see, I see'. This subtype also includes expressions produced with brief non-lexical vocalisation such as *e hontoni* 'oh, really' or *aa sooka* 'oh, I see'. Expressions in BC turns of this subtype are basically treated as one BC token as is the case of BC turn with single expression. If there is a pause or remarkable change

in speed between each item, they will be treated as separate tokens. The other subtype is produced in combination of more than two BC tokens, such as *a hontoni? iina* ‘oh, really? that’s good’ or *aa soonan’ya sugoi* ‘oh, is that so? great’. The speaker’s brief vocalisation such as *n :* may be inserted between the first and the second tokens. The analysis of the form and function will be on a token basis. Therefore, in these analyses, BC tokens of the second subtype will be treated separately.

### **2.3. SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I have explained the method for data collection, and identified four types of BC behaviour, i.e. BC expressions, repetitions, cooperative completions, and head nods. These four types of BC behaviour are important for our analysis of collected data. Keeping these four in mind, let us now move to discuss BC usage observed in the data.

## **Chapter 3**

# **FREQUENCY OF BACK-CHANNELS**

### **3.0. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I will discuss the frequency of BCs produced by learners and native speakers of Japanese based on the observation of conversations collected for the current study. It is widely viewed that learners produce fewer BCs than Japanese native speakers do (Horiguchi 1990; Watanabe 1994). However, the current study will demonstrate that learners in fact produce BCs as frequently as native speakers do.

### 3.1. BACKGROUND

Identified BCs are analysed firstly in terms of their frequency. As noted previously, BCs are found to occur either singly, e.g. *honto* ‘really’, or in a combination of more than one token, e.g. *soonan’ya sugoi* ‘is that so? great’. The latter case is regarded as consisting of two BC tokens, *soonan’ya* and *sugo:i*. The analysis of frequency is on turn basis (cf. Section 2.2.5). Therefore, both of the cases, singly occurring and those in combination, will be considered as a single BC turn produced by the listener. Head nods which are not accompanied by verbal BCs are counted in the analysis of frequency<sup>9</sup>. Both single and multiple head nods are counted as one BC turn.

### 3.2. THE NUMBER OF BACK-CHANNEL TURNS

In all the 10 conversations, 150 minutes in total, 2492 BC turns are produced by 20 participants. Out of 2492 BC turns, 2188 are verbal BCs, and 304 head nods. Table 3 shows the number of BC turns observed in the collected conversations.

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<sup>9</sup> The head nods accompanied by BCs are included in the number of verbal BCs.

**Table 3. Number of BC turns**

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	total	mean
L	72	116	139	62	81	470	94
N	193	111	127	145	147	723	144.6
total	265	227	266	207	228	1193	238.6

	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	total	mean
NSa	71	168	53	135	181	1299	129.9
NSb	251	88	128	176	48		
total	322	256	181	311	229		259.8

In total, there are 1193 BC turns observed in five N-L conversations. Ls produce BCs 470 times in total and Ns 723 times. BC turns appear most frequently in C3, 266 times in 15 minutes. The smallest number is 207 of C4. In five NS-NS conversations, 1299 BC turns are observed in total. This number is greater than the case of N-L conversations by 106 BC turns. Among all 20 participants, NS10b produces fewest BC turns, 48 times, in 15 minutes. The highest number is 251 BC turns for NS6b. The fewest BC turns in the L group is 62 turns and the highest, 139. All Ns produce relatively many BC turns, which is more than 100 times.

**Figure 1. Average number of BC turns**

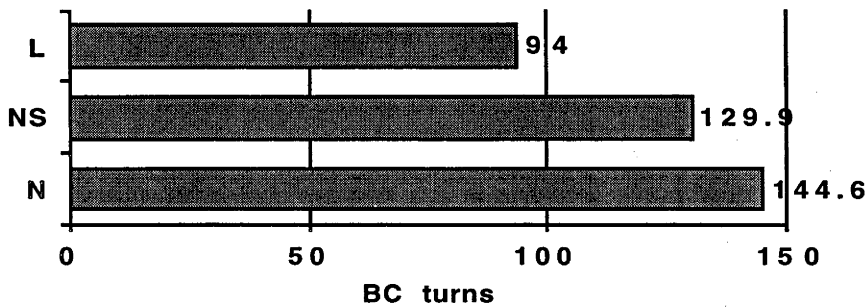


Figure 1 shows the average number of BC turns for each group. The order of the number of BC turns are shown as the order of:  $N > NS > L$ . The L group displays the fewest number of BC turns, 94 on average. Their conversational partners, Ns, produce the highest number of BC turns, 144.6 on average. Another interesting fact is that the difference between N and NS is relatively small, which is 14.7 turns. There is a remarkable difference in the number of BC turns between learners and native speakers, and that between group L and NS is 35.9 turns. The difference between group L and N is even greater, 50.6 BC turns. At first glance, due to the fact that learners produce fewer BCs in number than native speakers, i.e. Ns and NSs, the reader may consider that learners do not produce BCs as frequently as do native speakers. However, further examination reveals that low occurrence in BCs numbers does not necessarily indicate a less frequent use of BCs. This issue will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.3.

On average, NS-NS conversations produce more BC turns than the N-L counterparts do. The difference is 21.2 turns in a fifteen-minute conversation. Such differences are deemed to be due to the fluency of the flow of the conversation. The learners who participated in the conversations are advanced learners. However, they still had more difficulties when speaking in a conversation than native speakers. In fact, learner's talk appears to contain more frequent pauses and hesitations than native speaker's, as illustrated by the following example.

- (6) L: soo : : .hh minna wa ano,= nihonjin no (.) kangaekata to- [wa (.)  
 so everyone Top well Japanese Gen way-of-thinking Top  
 ‘Yeah, everyone, well, the Japanese think,
- N: [°n : °  
 uh huh  
 ‘Uh huh’
- L: ano : : (.) shidonii toka (..) ano : [kyanberra no .hh [nakani  
 well Sydney or well Canberra Gen inside  
 ‘well, in Sydney or in Canberra,
- N: [aa : [(kok)  
 ah  
 ‘Ah’
- L: kangaruu ga to (.) to koara ga  
 Kangaroo Sub and and koala Sub  
 ‘(there are) kangaroos and koalas,’  
 (..)
- N: aa [ a mo minna m- mazatcha-  
 ah all mixed-  
 ‘Ah, all mixed (up),’
- L: [ ano : iru (.) to omot[teru? ano,= nihonjin wa.  
 well there are QT is thinking well Japanese TOP  
 ‘well, the Japanese think (like that).’
- N: [°n : n : °  
 uh huh  
 ‘Uh huh’
- (C3)

The insertion of words such as *ano*, *etto*, *nanka*, etc., which are so-called fillers, is observed more frequently in N-L conversations than in NS-NS. Even native speakers

are less fluent in N-L conversations than in NS-NS. More repairs and repetitions appeared in Ns talk than in that of NSs.

(7) N: aru [kedo: (..) aru kedo : (....) tokuni sono: reitaa iyaa no?  
there-is but there-is but especially well later-year Gen  
' I do, but, I do, but especially (English spoken by) later year  
students,'

L: [aru  
there-is  
'You do.'

N: ano : (.) sanyonensei?  
well third and fourth year students  
'well, third and fourth year students,'

(.)

L: un  
uh huh  
'Uh huh.'

N: tte iu to (..) ma sore ni kagirazu na n da kedo:  
QT say if well it to not-limit Cop Nom Cop but  
'well, not only that, but'

L: n : hun  
uh huh  
'Uh huh.'

(....)

N: ano : : : : (.) anmari tokai shusshin ja nai hito? shidonii toka :  
well not much city come-from not people Sydney or  
'well, those people not from big cities like Sydney, or,'

L: n : n :  
uh huh  
'Uh huh.'



N: ja naku te :,  
 Neg and  
 'not (from big cities), but'

L: n : n :  
 uh huh  
 'Uh huh.'

(.)

N: koko kara gojikan toka,  
 here from five hours or  
 'for example, places from five hours from here, or,'

(C2)

On the whole, conversations between a native speaker and a learner contain more pauses, hesitation, and/or slower speech than conversations between native speakers.

### 3.3. THE NUMBER OF SYLLABLES PER BACK-CHANNEL TURN

In 3.2, we have observed that learners produce a smaller number of BC turns than Ns and NSs do on average. However, this fact does not immediately indicate that learners produce BCs less frequently than native speakers of Japanese. BCs are produced by listeners in a conversation. Therefore, it is quite possible that the opportunity to produce BC turns is greater for those who tend to play the role of the listener.

Let us suppose, for instance, there are two people who produced the same number of BC turns. One of them is playing the listener's role for a longer period of time and the other shorter. This means that the latter person produced BC turns more frequently than the other as this person produced the same number of BC turns in the shorter period. That is, the number of BC turns might not necessarily prove the frequency of BC turns. There is the possibility that the results obtained from counting the number of BC turns might have been influenced greatly by the difference of the length of time one played the listener's role.

The results will be examined further to determine whether or not the results actually reflect the frequency of BCs. Observing the number of syllables occurring between BC turns would be helpful to determine more accurately how often BCs are displayed. Examining the number of syllables also allows us to observe whether or not learners produce BC turns at longer intervals than do native speakers. Low frequency is often mentioned as one of the aspects which are considered to be problematic in learners' use of BC in Japanese<sup>10</sup>. As frequent display of BCs is expected in Japanese conversation, it is often claimed that the low frequent use of BCs by learners make native speakers feel uncomfortable when they are talking.

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<sup>10</sup> This problematic aspect of the learners' use of BC in Japanese might not be true for learners of all proficiency levels. However, Watanabe (1994) notes that not much difference was observed in the frequency of BC between different levels including advanced learners.

This analysis will focus on the fragments of talk where each participant is playing the listener's role for the longest duration in a conversation in which he or she participated. First, fragments of a conversation are selected for every participant. Then, the number of syllables included in the speaker's talk in each segment is counted. The number of syllables is divided by the number of BC turns displayed in the fragment. Both verbal and non-verbal BCs are included as BC turns. Further, those BCs which follow immediately after the speaker's talk are included in this analysis, as they are regarded as being given for the speaker's talk, even though they do not occur during the speaker's turn. As a result, the average number of syllables per BC turn is obtained. The number of syllables per BC turn indicates how often participants produce BC turns regardless of the difference in the length of time participants are assuming the role of the listener. The number of syllables per BC turn is interpreted as: the fewer these numbers are, the shorter the interval between BCs, and thus more frequently BCs are used. There is a point to note with regard to the procedures of this analysis. As the duration for which a participant continued to play the listener's role varies, some of the fragments are long and some not. In the case that the total number of syllables in the selected segment is less than 100, the second longest segment is added, i.e. N1, NS7a, and NS8b. Therefore, there are some cases where more than one segment is included. The results are shown in Table 4a.

**Table 4a. Number of syllables per BC turn**

<b>Participants (listener)</b>	<b>No. of syllables* (speaker's talk)</b>	<b>No. of BC turns</b>	<b>No. of syllables per BC turn</b>
<b>L 1</b>	154	14	11
<b>L 2</b>	453	27	16.8
<b>L 3</b>	334	29	11.5
<b>L 4</b>	129	9	14.3
<b>L 5</b>	164	10	16.4
			<b>mean 14.0</b>
<b>N 1</b>	129	18	7.2
<b>N 2</b>	139	10	13.9
<b>N 3</b>	108	11	9.8
<b>N 4</b>	163	12	13.6
<b>N 5</b>	177	13	13.6
			<b>mean 11.6</b>
<b>NS6a</b>	100	8	12.5
<b>NS6b</b>	255	17	15
<b>NS7a</b>	207	13	15.9
<b>NS7b</b>	109	10	10.9
<b>NS8a</b>	164	11	14.9
<b>NS8b</b>	253	14	18.1
<b>NS9a</b>	114	8	14.3
<b>NS9b</b>	144	13	11.1
<b>NS10a</b>	201	18	11.2
<b>NS10b</b>	125	9	13.9
			<b>mean 13.8</b>

\* Number of syllables produced by conversational partners.

The number of syllables per BC turn ranges from the lowest of 7.2, to the highest of 18.1. The average number of syllables is 14.0 for the L group, 11.6 for the N, and 13.8 for NS. The N group shows the lowest number and L the highest. The difference between the L group and the NS group is too slight (only 0.2 syllables) to be regarded as a meaningful difference. Therefore, the results are interpreted as: N > NS, L. On average Ns use BCs at shorter intervals compared with NSs and Ls. The

frequency of BCs is about the same for NSs and Ls in terms of the interval, not the number of occurrences.

In short, learners produce BCs as frequently as do native speakers as far as the examined segments are concerned. The general assumption that learners produce BCs at longer intervals or at a lower frequency rate is not supported.

We now turn to consider the result of frequency in connection with the whole number of BCs produced. The results obtained from the analysis of the number of syllables do not support the implication obtained from the results from the analysis of the number of BC turns obtained earlier in this study. That is, the results from number of BC turns occurring in conversations show that learners use much fewer BCs than native speakers. But, again the results from the number of syllables indicate that the learners produce BCs at almost the same intervals as native speakers do. A question was raised earlier: does the fewer BC turns produced by learners actually reflect less frequent use of BCs, or simply the difference in the length of time they are playing the listener's role? Let us take a closer look at the results from the analyses of the number of BC turns produced and the number of syllables per BC turn. Table 4b shows the number of BC turns produced in a fifteen-minute conversation and the number of syllables per BC turn in the segment where each participant is playing the listener's role for the longest duration of time. A lower number of syllables per BC turn indicates that BCs are produced at shorter intervals,

and higher at a longer intervals. Therefore, if the number of occurrences of BCs reflects the frequency of BCs, participants who produce more BC turns should show a lower number of syllables per BC turn. In Table 4b, such a tendency is observed in the pairs for C1, C5, C9 and C10.

**Table 4b. Number of BC turns and number of syllables per BC turn**

	<b>L</b>		<b>N</b>	
	BC turns	Syllables per BC turn	BC turns	Syllables per BC turn
<b>C1</b>	72	11	193	7.2
<b>C2</b>	116	16.8	111	13.9
<b>C3</b>	139	11.5	127	9.8
<b>C4</b>	62	14.3	145	13.6
<b>C5</b>	81	16.4	147	13.6

	<b>NSa</b>		<b>NSb</b>	
	BC turns	Syllables per BC turn	BC turns	Syllables per BC turn
<b>C6</b>	71	12.5	251	15
<b>C7</b>	168	15.9	88	10.9
<b>C8</b>	53	14.9	128	18.1
<b>C9</b>	135	14.3	176	11.1
<b>C10</b>	181	11.2	48	13.9

In the case of C1, for example, N1 produces more BC turns (193 turns) than her interlocutor, L1 (72 turns). Furthermore, N1's fewer syllables per BC turn (7.2 for N1 and 11 for L1) indicates that she produces BC turns at shorter intervals than L1 does. These results of analysing both BC turns and syllables per BC turn clearly indicate that N1 produced BC turns more frequently than L1.

Let us now observe the pair of L4 and N4, i.e. C4. L4 produces fewer BC turns (62 turns) than N4 (145 turns), and shows greater figure (14.3) than N4 (13.6) for syllables per BC turn. Thus, at a glance, this pair also looks to demonstrate the case that greater number of BC turn and less figure of syllables per BC turn always indicate more frequent production of BCs. However, a closer observation shows that this is not true. That is, N4 produces 83 more BC turns than L4. In spite of the difference of 83 BC turns, the results of the number of syllables per BC turn does not show much difference, which is only a difference of 0.7 syllables. If the greater number of BCs produced by N4, i.e. 83 more BC turns than L4, indicates that N4 produces BCs more frequently, intervals between BCs should be smaller for N4. In other word, the number of syllables per BC turn for N4 should be much lower than that of L4. However, the results only show a minimal difference. Consequently, C4 is not regarded as the case where the fewer number of BC turns demonstrate that BCs are produced frequently, namely at shorter intervals. Thus, there are only four out of ten conversational pairs which are the case where more BC turns in number indicate the fact that BCs are produced frequently.

This observation clearly shows that the number of occurrences of BC turns does not necessarily reflect the frequency of BC turns. By the same token, learners' fewer numbers of BC turns than native speakers' may not indicate that learners produce BCs less frequently. In fact, our observation will reveal that the number of BC turns is closely related to the length of time a participant is playing the listener's role.

On the whole, in the collected conversations, one of the conversational pairs is more likely to be a listener than the other. In fact, this is reflected in the number of BC turns produced. Let us take a closer look.

Table 5 shows the number of syllables which are contained in the segments where each participant plays the role of the ‘speaker’ for the longest duration of time in fifteen-minute conversations. The numbers shown in Table 5 are not necessarily the same as those shown in Table 4, i.e. 154 for N1, 109 for NS7a, and 164 for NS8b, as the longest and the second longest segments are added for the cases of these participants when calculating the number of syllables per BC turn. Participants with numbers in bold letters indicates they produce higher numbers of syllables than their conversational partners.

**Table 5. Number of syllables in the segment each participant is engaged as a ‘speaker’ for the longest time**

	<b>C 1</b>	<b>C 2</b>	<b>C 3</b>	<b>C 4</b>	<b>C 5</b>
<b>L</b>	<b>1 2 9</b>	1 3 9	1 0 8	<b>1 6 3</b>	<b>1 7 7</b>
<b>N</b>	9 3	<b>4 5 3</b>	<b>3 3 4</b>	1 2 9	1 6 4
	<b>C 6</b>	<b>C 7</b>	<b>C 8</b>	<b>C 9</b>	<b>C 10</b>
<b>NSa</b>	<b>2 5 5</b>	5 9	<b>2 5 3</b>	<b>1 4 4</b>	1 2 5
<b>NSb</b>	1 0 0	<b>2 0 7</b>	9 3	1 1 4	<b>2 0 1</b>

The selected segments are, as noted above, those where each participant is playing the role of ‘speaker’ for the longest length of time in their conversation. Accordingly,



it is possible that the participant who produces more syllables in such segments than his or her interlocutor dominates a conversation as the speaker. Those who tend to be the speakers do not have as many opportunities to produce BCs as their interlocutors. In fact, all participants who produce a higher number of syllables produce a fewer number of BC turns than their interlocutor without exception (cf. Table 3 and Table 5). In other words, all those who are assumed to dominate a conversation as the speaker produce a fewer number of BC turns than their interlocutors. This indicates that the number of BC turns is more likely to reflect the length of time one is assuming the role of the listener, rather than the frequency rate of BC turns. This observation supports the claim that the fewer number of BCs produced by learners does not necessarily mean that they display BCs at a lower frequency. Furthermore, the analysis of the number of syllables reveals that the intervals between the learner's BCs are about the same as their NS counterparts. Therefore, as far as our data for advanced learners is concerned, I shall claim that the learners produce BCs as frequently as native speakers do, although they produce a fewer number of BCs.

In summary, Section 3.3. has investigated whether or not the number of BC turns reflects the frequency of BCs based on the observation of the number of syllables per BC turn. The investigation has demonstrated that the number of BC turns produced does not necessarily indicates the frequent use of BCs, and therefore learners' fewer number of BCs does not always mean that learners produce less frequently than

native speakers do. Rather, it has been shown that learners produce BCs as frequently as native speakers do in spite the fact that learners produced fewer BCs than native speakers in conversations.

### **3.4. FREQUENCY OF BACK-CHANNEL TURNS OF LEARNERS**

Above, we have discussed the aspect of frequency of BCs. The results do not support the common claim that learners display BCs less frequently than do native speakers. Although native speakers produce more BC turns than learners in number, our observation of the number of syllables indicates that the number of occurrences is influenced greatly by the length of time a participant is playing the role of listener. The investigation based on the number of syllables per BC turn revealed that learners produce BC turns as frequently as native speakers.

Less frequent use of BCs by learners of Japanese language than native speakers is reported by Horiguchi (1990), which appears to contradict the result of our investigation. That is, Horiguchi reports that learners produce 3.0 BCs per minute on average. Horiguchi concludes that learners produce BCs less frequently by comparing with the results of Mizutani (1983, 1984), which report native speakers produce approximately 17 BCs per minute. However, I would like point out that Horiguchi's result is based on the average number of occurrences of BCs during the whole

conversation. Again, it should be emphasised that it is not the case that fewer BC numbers necessarily indicates a less frequent use of BCs. Rather, there is the possibility that the number of occurrences reflects the length of time a participant is assuming the role of the listener. Hence, it is considered inappropriate to make the claim that learners produce BCs less frequently as they produce fewer BCs in number. The current study claims that learners produce BCs as frequently as do native speakers on the basis of the number of syllables per BC turn, i.e. intervals between BC turns.

With regard to the number of BCs produced by learners, the number of BCs in the current study is greater than that in Horiguchi (1990), although it is less than that of native speakers in the both. In the current study, learners produce 6.2 BC turns per minute on average, while Horiguchi reports 3.6 BC turns per minute. A possible explanation for the greater number of BC turns in the current study is that the current study includes the non-verbal BC. i.e. head nods. The number of BCs produced is also greater for the current study than that of Watanabe (1994) which is based on telephone interviews: on average, advanced learners produce 4.0 BCs per 100 syllables and native speakers 5.5 BCs in Watanabe (1994) and 7.1 BCs for Ls and 7.2 for NSs per 100 syllables in the present study. Recall that the present study is based on face-to-face casual conversations and includes head nods as BCs. The difference between the present study and Watanabe (1994) is deemed to be due to different methodologies adopted.

### 3.5. DIFFERENCE AMONG NATIVE SPEAKERS IN N-L AND NS-NS CONVERSATIONS

So far, we have mainly discussed the frequency of BCs produced by learners. We now focus on the frequency of BCs for native Japanese speakers in N-L and NS-NS conversations. First, observe the following.

**Table 6a. Number of syllables per BC turn for NSs**

	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	mean
NSa	12.5	15.9	14.9	14.3	11.2	13.8
NSb	15	10.9	18.1	11.1	13.9	

Table 6a shows the number of syllables per BC turn for NSs. Generally, Japanese listeners are recognised as displaying BCs frequently. However, as Table 6a shows, some native speakers display BCs very frequently and others do not. In contrast, all the Ns produce BCs more frequently than their interlocutors, i.e. learners, as shown in Table 6b.

**Table 6b. Number of syllables per BC turn for Ls and Ns**

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	mean
L	11	16.8	11.5	14.3	16.4	14
N	7.2	13.9	9.8	13.6	13.6	11.6

It is remarkable that all Ns show frequent use of BCs despite the possibility that some Ns produce BCs less frequently. Furthermore, the mean of the number of syllables per BC turn for the N group is lower than that for the NS group: 11.6 for the N group and 13.8 for the NS group. As such, the results clearly show a difference in the frequency of BCs between the N group and the NS group. That is, native speakers in N-L conversations produce BCs more frequently than native speakers in NS-NS conversations.

This observation implies that the frequency of BCs may change depending on whether a native speaker is talking with a native speaker or with a learner. It is possible that the difference observed in the frequency of BCs between Ns and NSs is an example of the speech adjustments which native speakers make in interacting with non-native speakers, i.e. “foreigner talk” (Ferguson 1971). Such adjustments are claimed to be made at both the grammatical level and conversational level in foreigner talk (Long 1983). For the given facts that native speakers show difference in the frequency of BCs when conversing with learners and with native speakers, it requires further investigation to determine whether or not this is the case of such speech adjustments, as native speaker participants in the N-L and NS-NS conversations are different individuals.

### 3.6. SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have observed the frequency of BCs produced by learners and native speakers. Learners produce fewer BCs compared with native speakers. However, our observations indicate that fewer BCs in number do not necessarily mean that BCs are produced less frequently. Therefore, on the basis of the results of the number of syllables per BC turn, which shows intervals between BCs, the current study claims that learners produce BCs as frequently as do native speakers. There is a clear difference observed in the frequency between native speakers in N-L conversations, i.e. Ns, and those in NS-NS conversations, i.e. NSs. That is, Ns produce more BCs than NSs. This may imply that native speakers change the frequency of BCs when conversing with learners than when conversing with native speakers, i.e. foreigner talk.

## **Chapter 4**

# **LOCATION OF BACK-CHANNELS**

### **4.0. INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter Four, we will discuss the location of BCs. We will first review some studies on this issue in Section 4.1. The analytical method will then be explained in Section 4.2. This will be followed by Section 4.3, where the location of BCs will be investigated in relation to places where speaker's utterances are possibly complete. In Section 4.4, we will investigate those BCs which do not occur at completion points in relation to some linguistic elements in the Japanese language. Finally, the location of BCs in general will be discussed based on the results in Section 4.5. The analysis will reveal that learners produce BCs constantly through conversation as do native speakers.

#### 4.1. RATIONALE

BC behaviour is closely related to the turn-taking system in conversation. As mentioned earlier, a BC does not constitute a speaking turn. BCs displayed by the listener show that he or she does not take a speaking turn and acknowledges the speaker as possessing the speaking turn at that moment. The context in which BCs are produced is investigated in reference to places of possible transition where a speaker change occurs in turn-taking system (Clancy et al. 1996; Oreström 1983; and others).

Transition from one speaker to another is considered to occur at places which Sacks et al. (1974) label as “transition-relevance place” (TRP). According to Sacks et al., which discusses a systematic organisation of turn-taking for conversation, turn is constructed from what are called “turn-constructual units” (TCUs). These include lexical, phrasal, clausal, and sentential constructions. The first possible completion of such a unit, i.e. TCU, constitutes an initial TRP (Sacks et al. 1974: 703). As Edmondson (1981) and other researchers point out, Sacks et al. do not clearly specify what defines a TCU, nor how the conversational participants recognise a TRP. What is assumed from Sacks et al. is that syntactical units play a major role in defining TCU.



Oreström (1983) investigates the relation between the end of a turn and several factors in terms of the issue of defining a TCU and a transition place of the speaker. According to Oreström, end of turn is highly related to prosodic, semantic, and syntactical cues. Oreström reports that the combination of the completion points of these three factors constitutes a major juncture for speaker change called “grammatical boundary”.

What is crucial to our investigation of BCs is the fact that transition places, where speaker change is possible, tend to constitute a relevant context for the occurrence of BCs in conversation, as indicated by many researchers (Clancy et al. 1996; Maynard 1989; Oreström 1983). Oreström (1983) examines the placement of brief BCs in English conversation, and reports that 77.2% of total BCs appear at a grammatical boundary. According to Oreström, at these grammatical boundaries the listener can either take the floor and become the speaker, or produce a BC.

Clancy et al. (1996), in a study comparing BCs in English, Japanese, and Mandarin, examine the location of BCs with respect to the speaker’s turn — whether BCs are produced at points where speaker change is possible or during the speaker’s turn. In identifying endings of basic turn units, Clancy et al. employ a “complex transition relevance place” (CTRP), which is defined as a point involving grammatical and intonational completion. According to Clancy et al., Mandarin speakers demonstrate the strongest preference to produce BCs at a CTRP, English the next strongest, and

Japanese the least, i.e. 79.5% of total BCs for Mandarin, 45.1% for English, and 30.8% for Japanese. Further, Clancy et al. discuss the placement of BCs at grammatical completion points, which are based on a semantic/pragmatic point of view. A number of grammatical completion points do not coincide with CTRPs whereas intonational completions do. The substantial preference of placing BCs at CTRPs over placing them at grammatical completion points is reported to be observed in English; 78% is produced at grammatical completion points while 30.8% at CTRPs. Conversely, Clancy et al. report that there are no great differences in the placement of BCs at CTRP and at grammatical completion points in Japanese and Mandarin, i.e. for CTRP, 30.8% for Japanese and 79.5% for Mandarin; for grammatical completion points, 36.6% for Japanese and 88.0% for Mandarin. Therefore, according to Clancy et al., in English, grammatical completion points are the context where BCs are expected to be produced. As for Japanese, BCs tend to be provided while the speaker is in progress rather than at the grammatical or intonational completion points (Clancy et al. 1996).

The tendency that BCs are less likely to occur at grammatical completion points in Japanese than in English is reported also by Maynard (1989). Maynard investigates three-minute segments of twenty Japanese conversations. Maynard reports that 51.02% of total BCs are provided at grammatical completion points which are defined on the basis of the combination of intonational and grammatical criteria. In

contrast, 82.84% of all BCs are observed at grammatical completion points in English conversation (Maynard 1989).

Locations where Japanese BCs appear are also referred to in relation to grammatical elements in Japanese (Maynard 1989; Mizutani 1988b; and others). It is reported that BCs tend to be produced in a context marked by final particles such as *ne* (Maynard 1986, 1989; Mizutani 1988b)<sup>11</sup>. Maynard (1989:173) notes that the final particle *ne* solicits a response from the listener either in the form of a BC or in the form of speaker change. According to Maynard (1989), BCs occur frequently during the pauses between clausal units, which are often marked by final particles as well as other grammatical elements, such as gerundive forms of verbs, conjunctive particles, or head movements by the speaker. Mizutani (1988b) refers to gerundive form and conjunctive particles, e.g. *kedo* 'although', *kara* 'because', as the elements which BCs are likely to follow.

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<sup>11</sup> 'Final particles' refer to a class of particles that are used at the end of a phrase which may or may not be a clause- or sentence-final position, and add the pragmatic information of the speaker's emotional attitude. In general, those particles that appear at the end of a sentence are referred to as *shuujoshi* 'sentence-final particles' and those that appear sentence-internally as *kantoojoshi* 'insertion particles'.

## 4.2. PROCEDURES OF THE ANALYSIS OF LOCATION OF BACK-CHANNELS

In order to examine the location of BCs, grammatical completion points in our conversational data are identified. A grammatical completion point refers to a place at which the speaker could finish an utterance grammatically and meaningfully in the given context. In the current study, even if utterances are not syntactically completed clauses, they are regarded as grammatically complete if they can be interpreted as being complete in the given context. Thus, elliptical clauses and clauses with gerundive endings of verbs are also considered as grammatically completed. Therefore, in identifying grammatical completion points, syntactic and semantic/pragmatic information is taken into consideration. The following is an example of the utterance which contains grammatical completion points (indicated here by double slashes).

- (8) NSb: hutsuuni minna tsukatteru // yo // sore. //  
common everyone is-using FP it  
'Everyone is normally using it.'

(C9)

As seen in this example, a unit between one grammatical point and the other that follows is not necessarily a grammatically completed sentence or phrase by itself. Rather, each unit divided by such points is understood as grammatical in relation to

the preceding units if available. For example, in example (8), the boundary after *hutsuuni minna tsukatteru* is the first possible grammatical completion point. The boundary after the second unit, *yo*, is the second possible completion points as it is understood as being grammatically complete in relation to the previous unit, i.e. *hutsuuni minna tsukatteru*. That is, the speaker could have finished the utterance grammatically at the boundary after *hutsuuni minna tsukatteru yo*. By the same token, the boundary after *hutsuuni minna tsukatteru yo sore* is identified as being the third grammatical completion point.

In examining the location of BCs, this study includes not only those BCs which immediately follow the points referred to without overlaps but also those occurring slightly preceded or delayed with overlaps. This is because the listener is assumed to participate in a conversation predicting the course of conversation and may produce BCs on the basis of such prediction. Furthermore, differences in speed of the speaker's talk appear to be related to the overlap of the speaker's talk and the listener's BCs. Therefore, it is considered necessary to take these facts into account in examining the location of BCs so as to a location will reflect the immediate surrounding environs where BCs occur.

In what follows, we will first observe BCs that are provided at grammatical completion points in Section 4.3. It is expected that learners tend to produce more BCs at grammatical completion points than native speakers do, due to the tendency

of English BCs being provided at grammatical completion points. In Section 4.4, we will then investigate the location of those BCs that do not occur at grammatical completion points in relation to some linguistic elements.

### 4.3. BACK-CHANNELS AT GRAMMATICAL COMPLETION POINTS

To begin with, BCs occurring in conversational data are examined whether or not they are produced at grammatical completion points. The results are shown in Table 7.

**Table 7. BCs at grammatical and non-grammatical completion points**

number of occurrence							
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	total	mean
GC	49	46	57	43	49	244(51.9%)	48.8
non- GC	23	70	82	19	32	226(48.1%)	45.2

	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	total	mean
GC	118	59	47	74	71	369(51.0%)	73.8
non- GC	75	52	80	71	76	354(49.0%)	70.8

	NS6 a	NS7 a	NS8 a	NS9 a	NS10 a		
GC	50	99	38	68	89		
non- GC	21	69	15	67	92		

	NS6 b	NS7 b	NS8 b	NS9 b	NS10 b	total	mean
GC	137	51	94	102	29	757(58.3%)	75.7
non- GC	114	37	34	74	19	542(41.7%)	54.2

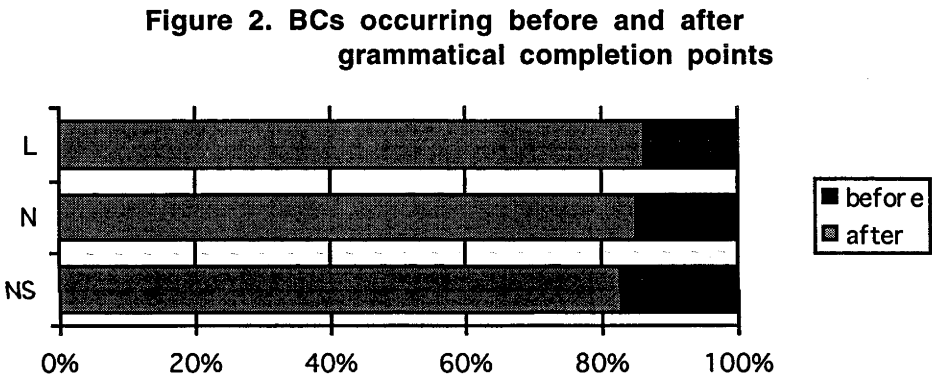
The results show that more than half of the total BCs are placed at grammatical completion points in all three groups. The NS group shows a higher percentage for BCs produced at grammatical completion points compared with the cases of other two groups. For the L group and the N group, BCs at grammatical completion points and those at non-grammatical points are of a similar percentage. The preference of placing BCs at grammatical completion points is shown as:  $NS > L, N$ .

Prior to the analysis, it was assumed the learners may produce more BCs at grammatical completion points being influenced by the tendency that BCs are produced at grammatical completion points in English. However, this assumption is not supported by the results of the current study.

Recall from Section 4.1. that in conversations between native speakers, BCs are less likely to appear at grammatical completion points in Japanese, compared with English and Mandarin (Clancy et al. 1996). To be more specific, in conversations between native speakers, only 36.6% of total BCs are provided at grammatical completion points in Japanese, which is remarkably low compared to 88% in Mandarin and 78% in English. The results of the current study indicate a greater proportion of BCs at grammatical completion points: 58.3% for the NSs. The difference between the results of the current study and that of Clancy et al. may be due to the fact that the current study regards a relatively wide range as location of occurrence. That is, the current study accepts BCs occurring slightly preceded and

delayed with overlaps as well as those which are produced immediately after the points. Clancy et al., conversely, count only those which are produced immediately after the place, without overlap.

Figure 2 below shows average percentages of BCs provided before reaching grammatical completion points and those after grammatical completion points for each group.



The figure indicates that the majority of BCs occurring at grammatical completion points are produced after the grammatical completion. All three groups produce BCs before reaching the points at similar percentages, 17.1% for NS, 14.9% for N, and 13.6% for L. Therefore, learners are assumed to produce BCs based on their assumption of the context of the speaker’s talk and prediction of the occurrence of grammatical completions as native speakers do.



#### **4.4. BACK-CHANNELS AT NON-GRAMMATICAL COMPLETION POINTS**

It has been shown in Section 4.3. that BCs occur at a relatively high rate at grammatical completion points: 58.3% for NS, 51.0% for N, and 51.9% for L. There still remains the matter of roughly half of the BCs, i.e. those which do not occur at places of grammatical completion. A question arises with regard to those BCs occurring at a non-grammatical completion point: are there any tendencies for places where BCs are likely to occur other than grammatical completions? In order to answer this question, we examine such BCs in reference to some linguistic features of Japanese. For the examination the following locations are selected: locations marked by (i) clausal junctures, (ii) grammar-oriented particles, and (iii) interaction-oriented particles. These devices share a common feature that is anticipated to be a relevant context for the occurrence of BCs. That is, they mark boundaries between elements of a sentence such as phrases or clauses that are often followed by a brief pause. Maynard (1989) reports that BCs are likely to occur near or during such pauses.

#### 4.4.1. Clausal Junctures

Clausal junctures are boundaries where two clauses are connected, such as conjuncture of subordinate clauses and that of coordinate clauses. The following is an example of junctures of a subordinate clause.

- (9) → NSb: demo nanka nikaime gurai ni iku hito ni kiku to:,  
but something second-time about for go person to ask if  
'But, well, according to those people who go (to Melbourne)  
for second time or so,'  
NSa: n:  
uh-huh  
'Uh huh.'  
NSb: nikaime gurai ni iku to moo meruborun yori  
second-time about for go if Melbourne than  
kyanbera no hoo ga suki ni natteru tte  
Canberra Gen Sub like have-come-to QT  
'if they go there for second time or so, they say that they  
become to like Canberra more than Melbourne.'  
(C7)

In (9), NSa produces BCs, *n:*, after the subordinate clause which is marked by a conjuncture, i.e. *to* 'if'. After this BC, NSa continues his utterance by producing the main clause.

#### 4.4.2. Grammar-Oriented Particles

In this study, the term ‘grammar-oriented particles’ is used to refer to particles which are closely related to syntactic structure of the Japanese language, i.e. case markers (*ga, o, ni, e, de*, etc.), range markers (*wa, mo, dake*, etc.), coordinators which join nouns (*to, ka, ya*, etc.). It excludes final particles (*ne, yo, sa*, etc.) and conjunctive particles (*tara, node, kara*, etc.)<sup>12</sup>. The following example illustrates locations where BCs occur at locations marked by grammar-oriented particles.

- (10) → L: watashi no: (.) tomodachi ga:  
I Gen friend Sub  
‘My friend is,’  
N: n: =  
uh huh  
‘Uh huh.’  
L: =>nanka< haafu no nihonjin de:,  
something half Gen Japanese Cop-and  
‘well, half Japanese, and,’  
N: n:  
uh huh  
‘Uh huh.’  
→ L: de kanjo ↑no: (.) kazoku ga:  
and she Gen family Sub  
‘and her family is,’  
N: °n:°

---

<sup>12</sup> Japanese particles are in general divided into several groups, such as case markers, range markers, coordinators, subordinators, sentence-final particles, etc. (see Backhouse 1993; Nihongo Kyooiku Gakkai 1990 for details of Japanese particles).

uh huh  
'Uh huh.'

(C5)

In the above example, N is the listener and produces three BCs, *n:*. The first and the third BCs are provided immediately after case markers, i.e. *ga*, in the speaker's utterance.

#### 4.4.3. Interaction-Oriented Particles

In the analysis of the location of BCs at non-grammatical completion points, the term 'interaction-oriented particle' is used to refer to the so-called final particles, e.g. *ne*, *yo*, *sa*, etc. These particles encode the pragmatic information of the speaker's emotional attitude in an utterance.

The following is an example of locations marked by interaction-oriented particles that are followed by BCs from the listener.

- (11) → NSb: .hh are fena    tte sa:,  
          Fenner QT    FP  
          'Well, in Fenner Hall,'  
      NSa: n:  
          uh-huh  
          'Uh huh.'

→ NSb: kaku huroaa ni sa:,  
 each floor on FP  
 ‘on each floor,’

NSa: n:  
 uh-huh  
 ‘Uh huh.’

NSb: .h konro aru?  
 cooking stoves there-are  
 ‘are there cooking stoves?’

(C9)

In above example (11), the speaker inserts the particle *sa:* twice during her speech.

NSa, the listener, provides BCs, *n:*, after these particles.

#### 4.4.4. Results

The location of BCs which do not occur at grammatical completion points are investigated in reference to the places marked by clausal junctures, grammar-oriented particles, and interaction-oriented particles. The results are shown in Table 8 and Figure 3, which indicate the percentages of BC turns that occur at these places.

**Table 8. BCs at non-grammatical completion points**

frequency (%)

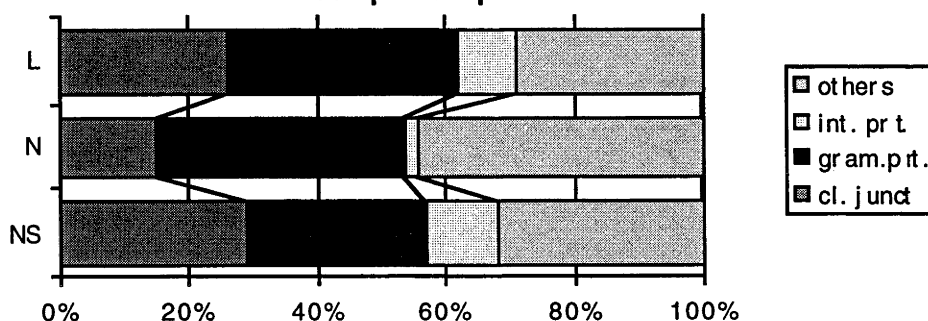
	L 1		L 2		L 3		L 4		L 5		total	mean	
cl. junct.	3	(13.0)	25	(35.7)	23	(28.0)	5	(26.3)	3	(9.4)	59	(26.1)	11.8
gram. prt.	10	(43.5)	20	(28.6)	34	(41.5)	7	(36.8)	10	(31.2)	81	(35.8)	16.2
int. prt.	2	(8.7)	8	(11.4)	3	(3.7)	4	(21.1)	3	(9.4)	20	(8.9)	4
others	8	(34.8)	17	(24.3)	22	(26.8)	3	(15.8)	16	(50.0)	66	(29.2)	13.2

	N 1		N 2		N 3		N 4		N 5		total	mean	
cl. junct.	9	(12.0)	18	(34.6)	10	(12.5)	9	(12.7)	7	(9.2)	53	(15.0)	10.6
gram. prt.	29	(38.7)	19	(36.5)	28	(35.0)	32	(45.1)	30	(39.5)	138	(39.0)	27.6
int. prt.	5	(6.6)	0	(0.0)	0	(0.0)	1	(1.4)	0	(0.0)	6	(1.7)	1.2
others	32	(42.7)	15	(28.9)	42	(52.5)	29	(40.8)	39	(51.3)	157	(44.3)	31.4

	NS6a		NS7a		NS8a		NS9a		NS10a	
cl. junct.	10	(47.6)	26	(37.7)	3	(20.0)	14	(20.9)	15	(16.3)
gram.prt.	4	(19.0)	19	(27.5)	5	(33.3)	25	(37.3)	37	(40.2)
int. prt.	1	(4.8)	2	(2.9)	1	(6.7)	11	(16.4)	12	(13.1)
others	6	(28.6)	22	(31.9)	6	(40.0)	17	(25.4)	28	(30.4)

	NS6b		NS7b		NS8b		NS9b		NS10b		total	mean
cl. junct.	33	(29.0)	13	(35.2)	12	(35.3)	21	(28.4)	8	(42.1)	155 (28.6)	15.5
gram.prt.	18	(15.8)	12	(32.4)	10	(29.4)	18	(24.3)	7	(36.8)	155 (28.6)	15.5
int. prt.	20	(17.5)	3	(8.1)	1	(2.9)	7	(9.5)	1	(5.3)	59(10.9)	5.9
others	43	(37.7)	9	(24.3)	11	(32.4)	28	(37.8)	3	(15.8)	173(31.9)	17.3

**Figure 3. BCs at non-grammatical completion points**



The results show that a relatively low percentage of BCs occur at places marked by interaction-oriented particles. The N group in particular marks a remarkably low

percentage for this place, which is 1.7% of all the BCs occurring at non-grammatical completion points. Three out of five Ns produced no BCs at all at a place marked by interaction-oriented particles.

The results also show that BCs, if not occurring at grammatical completion points, tend to be produced at locations marked by grammar-oriented particles and clausal junctures. More particularly, a context marked by a grammar-oriented particle is a place where a BC is most likely to appear for the L group and the N group. The NS group tends to produce similar percentages of BCs at grammar-oriented particles and clausal junctures.

It is notable that the L group and the NS group show similar overall tendencies for the location of BCs (cf. Figure 3). For these two groups, approximately 70% of all BCs at non-grammatically completed locations are produced at one of the three places. On the whole, the results indicate that learners produce BCs at a similar location as do native speakers.

It is also interesting to observe the difference between the N group and the NS group (cf. Table 8 and Figure 3). Recall that the N group marks a lower percentage for the location marked by interaction-oriented particles, i.e. 1.7% for the N group and 10.9% for the NS. In addition, for the NS group, both grammar-oriented particles and clausal junctures are the locations where BCs tend to be produced while the N group

produces more BCs at grammar-oriented particles (cf. Table 8). One of the possible reasons for these differences may be traced to different manners of speaking. The availability of locations for the listener in the speaker's talk is deemed to be reflected in the results. Again, for example, three out of five Ns produce no BCs around interaction-oriented particles at non-grammatical completion points. This may be due to the fact that they have fewer or no such opportunities to provide BCs. In the collected conversational data, learners appear not to use final particles as frequently as native speakers do at non-grammatical completion points. This is especially remarkable in the case of L2, L3, and L5, who are conversational partners of those Ns who produce no BCs at interaction-oriented particles. Furthermore, learners tend to use final particles at grammatical completion point rather than using them at non-grammatical completion points, which is seen in the following.

- (12) L: yoru: dat tara: (...) tokidoki wa (..) terebi o mitari:;=  
 night Cop if sometimes Top TV Obj watch-and  
 'If it's at night, I sometimes watch TV, and,'
- N: = n:  
 uh huh  
 'Uh huh.'
- (..)
- L: chotto benkyoo shitari:  
 a-little study do-and  
 'study a little bit, and'
- N: n :  
 uh huh  
 'Uh huh.'



- L: n : sono gurai: °> desu ka ne<°  
 yeah that about Cop Q FP  
 ‘yeah, that’s about it.’
- N: huun  
 I-see  
 ‘I see.’
- L: °yappari:.,°=  
 after-all  
 ‘After all,’
- N: = sono .hh  
 well  
 ‘Well,’
- L: omoshiroi: (.) ku nai: (.) seikatsu desu [ne.  
 interesting not life Cop FP  
 ‘(It’s) not an interesting life.’
- N: [↓aa  
 ah  
 ‘Ah.’

(C2)

Here, L is playing the role of speaker and N is the listener. While L is talking, L produces sentence-final particles *ne* twice. Both of them are produced at the grammatical completion points.

Conversely, native speakers tend to use more interaction-oriented particles compared to learners.

- (13) → NSb : e ano sa: ,=  
that FP  
‘Well,’
- NSa : =n [:  
uh huh  
‘Uh huh.’
- NSb : [.hh nanka sa : (.) tai ka chuugoku ka nanka  
something FP Thai or China or something
- shinnai kedo [sa : ,.hh  
not-know but FP  
‘(I’m) not sure if it’s Thai or Chinese, but’
- NSa : [n :  
uh huh  
‘Uh huh.’
- NSb : hosoi toomei no sa : ,  
thin transparent Gen FP  
‘thin and transparent,’
- NSa : n :  
uh huh  
‘Uh huh.’
- (.)
- NSb : kansooshi[ta sa : men yoku [mikakenai ?  
dried FP noodles often not-see  
‘dried noodles, don’t you often see (them)?’
- NSa : [n : n : n : [ aru aru aru  
yeah yeah yeah there is there is there is  
‘Yeah, yeah, yeah.’ ‘There is.’

(C9)

In NSb's utterances in the above conversation, NSb uses insertion particles, *sa:*, five times at non-grammatical completion points. Although there are individual differences, the use of interaction-oriented particles at non-grammatical completion points, on the whole, is more frequent in native speaker's talk than in that of learners. This observation of the location marked by interaction-oriented particles indicates that the results are possibly influenced by the availability of these locations in the speaker's talk.

There is another thing to note in regard to the results for the location marked by interaction-oriented particles. As mentioned earlier, final particles are often referred to as one of the most likely contexts in which BCs occur (Maynard 1986, 1989; Mizutani 1988b). Our results for interaction-oriented particles turn out as the context that marks the lowest percentage of BCs occurring among the three locations in the present study. A possible explanation for the lower number of BCs at interaction-oriented particles is related to the fact that the results of the current study is obtained from the analysis which is limited to those BCs which occur at non-grammatical completion points. That is, our analysis focuses on particles that occur at non-grammatical completion points, excluding those produced at grammatical completion points. It is certainly possible to assume that the percentages of BCs occurring at each location become higher if BCs appearing at grammatical completion points are also included.

In this section, we have observed the location of BCs that occur at non-grammatical completion points. The results show that the overall tendency of the location of BCs is similar for the L group and the NS group.

#### **4.5. GENERAL TENDENCIES OF THE PLACEMENT OF BACK-CHANNELS**

Above, I have discussed separately the location of BCs which occur at grammatical completion points in Section 4.3, and BCs which occur at non-grammatical completion points in Section 4.4. In Section 4.5, I will consider general tendencies observed in the location of BCs for both grammatical and non-grammatical completion points.

As noted earlier, the three locations, i.e. clausal junctures, grammar-oriented particles, and interaction-oriented particles, have a common feature. They mark boundaries between lexical, phrasal, clausal and sentential units, which are often followed by brief pauses. This feature shares a similarity with the grammatical completion points. The only difference is whether the boundary is located in the middle of the speaker's talk or at the potential end of the talk, that is, whether or not the syntactically marked boundary coincides with boundary of the meaning. If a clausal juncture or a location marked by particles can be an end of the speaker's talk in the given context,

the location will be referred to as grammatical completion points. On the basis of this perspective, all the BCs produced at one of the three locations and grammatical completion points are considered as sharing a common feature: They are produced at syntactically marked boundaries which may or may not be boundaries of the meaning in the given context.

What does this imply with regard to the results obtained from our observation of the location of BCs? Table 9 indicates that the total of those BCs occurring at one of the three locations (grammatical completion points, clausal junctures, grammar-oriented particles) and interaction-oriented particles are 86.0% for group L, 78.3% for group N, and 86.7% for group NS. A high proportion of BCs is produced around these boundaries, particularly in the case of the L and NS groups; more than 86% of all BCs are provided at one of the locations.

**Table 9. BCs at boundaries and non-boundaries**

	<b>L 1</b>	<b>L 2</b>	<b>L 3</b>	<b>L 4</b>	<b>L 5</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>mean</b>
<b>boundary</b>	64	99	117	59	65	404 (86.0%)	80.8
<b>non-bound</b>	8	17	22	3	16	66 (14.0%)	13.2
	<b>N 1</b>	<b>N 2</b>	<b>N 3</b>	<b>N 4</b>	<b>N 5</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>mean</b>
<b>boundary</b>	161	96	85	116	108	566 (78.3%)	113.2
<b>non-bound</b>	32	15	42	29	39	157 (21.7%)	31.4
	<b>NS6a</b>	<b>NS7a</b>	<b>NS8a</b>	<b>NS9a</b>	<b>NS10a</b>		
<b>boundary</b>	65	146	47	118	153		
<b>non-bound</b>	6	22	6	17	28		
	<b>NS6b</b>	<b>NS7b</b>	<b>NS8b</b>	<b>NS9b</b>	<b>NS10b</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>mean</b>
<b>boundary</b>	208	79	117	148	45	1126(86.7%)	112.6
<b>non-bound</b>	43	9	11	28	3	173 (13.3%)	17.3

Furthermore, recall that the results regarding the BCs at grammatical completion points do not support the assumption that learners may produce more at grammatical completion points than native speakers. This shows that learners produce BCs constantly while the speaker's talk is in progress rather than waiting for completion points. As a result, the analysis of the location of BCs reveals that learners produce BCs constantly at similar locations as do native speakers.

#### **4.6. SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the location of BCs in relation to the grammatical completion points and some grammatical elements in Japanese have been observed. The analysis reveals that there are no great differences in the overall tendencies in terms of the location of BCs between learners and native speakers.

More than half of the total BCs are placed at grammatical completion points in all three groups, i.e. 51.9% for group L, 51.0% for N, and 58.3% for NS. The assumption that learners produce more BC at grammatical completion points than native speakers is not supported. Learners produce BCs constantly through conversation by placing BCs while the speaker is constructing his or her talk and at grammatical completion points. BCs not occurring at grammatical completion points tend to be placed at boundaries that are closely related to the syntactic structure of

Japanese in the L and NS groups. In general, learners produce BCs at boundaries that are either grammatical completion points or marked with grammatical elements as frequently as do native speakers.

## **Chapter 5**

# **FORM OF BACK-CHANNELS**

### **5.0. INTRODUCTION**

There are a variety of BCs identified in the Japanese language, and a number of different forms of BCs are found in the collected conversational data. The use of appropriate form of BCs is one of the most important issues in teaching BCs in the Japanese language (Horiguchi 1988, Matsuda 1988). This chapter focuses on the formal aspects of BCs used by learners and native speakers.

This chapter is organised as follows. The distribution of the four BC types is observed in Section 5.1, i.e. BC expression, repetition, cooperative completion, and head nods<sup>13</sup>. In Section 5.2, the different forms of BC expressions are examined in reference to their quantitative and qualitative aspects. Finally, we will investigate the

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapter Two for details of these four types.



use of head nods in Section 5.3, which is claimed to occur frequently in Japanese conversation.

As previously noted, the analysis is conducted on a token basis rather than a turn basis<sup>14</sup>. In the case of a combination of more than two BC tokens which forms a single BC turn, each BC token is treated separately (cf. Section 2.2.5.). Expressions which have similar forms are regarded as the same expression. For example, *soodane* and *soodane:* are represented as the same expression, *soodane*, and *huun* and *huu:n*, represented as *huun*.

This analysis will show that there is a remarkable difference in the variety of BC expressions used by learners and native speakers, more specifically, learners are found to use less varieties of BC expressions than native speakers.

## 5.1. THE DISTRIBUTION OF BACK-CHANNEL TYPES

The number of tokens occurring for each BC type is presented in Table 10. This table shows that BC expressions are used most frequently, 2048 times, followed by 304 head nods, 208 repetitions. Cooperative completion is the least frequent, appearing

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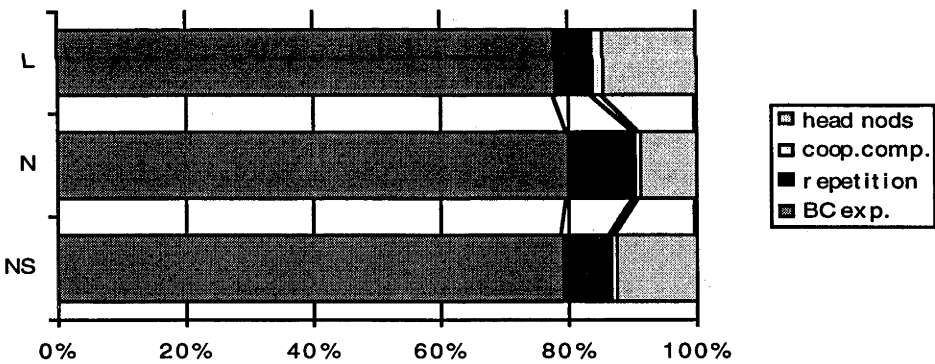
<sup>14</sup> The analyses of form do not include those BC tokens which are not uttered completely, as endings of BCs are considered very important in the analyses of forms. There are four such tokens in BCs produced by NSs: they are *soonan*, *soona*, *soonansu*, *a hon*. *Soonan* and *a hon* appeared twice and the remains once in the collected conversations.

26 times. All the BC types, except cooperative completions, are used by all twenty participants. There are seven out of twenty participants who did not use cooperative completions, i.e. two Ls, one N, and four NSs.

**Table 10. BC types and frequencies**

frequency (%)						
	<b>L</b>		<b>N</b>		<b>NS</b>	<b>total</b>
<b>BC expressions</b>	379 (78.0)		604 (80.0)		1065 (79.2)	2048
<b>Head nods</b>	70 (14.4)		66 ( 8.8 )		168 (12.5)	304
<b>Repetitions</b>	28 ( 5.8 )		78 (10.3)		102 ( 7.6 )	208
<b>Coop. Comps.</b>	9 ( 1.8 )		7 ( 0.9 )		10 ( 0.7 )	26
<b>total</b>	486		755		1345	2586
<b>mean</b>	97.2		151		134.5	

**Figure 4. Forms of BCs**



In all three groups, BC expressions form the majority of the total BC tokens produced, i.e. 78% for the L group, 80% for the N, and 79.2% for the NS. BCs produced by Ns contain a slightly higher percentage of repetitions compared with the other two groups. The highest percentage of head nods is contained in the BCs used by the L group.

For the L group and the NS group, the order of BC types with regard to the number of occurrences is: BC expressions > head nods > repetitions > cooperative completions. Slight differences are observed in the order for the N group. The N group produces repetitions more frequently than head nods, i.e. BC expressions > repetitions > head nods > cooperative completions.

A number of different forms of expression are observed in BC expressions in the collected conversations of this study. In Section 5.2, BC expressions used by the participants are discussed in detail.

## **5.2. BACK-CHANNEL EXPRESSIONS**

### **5.2.1. The Variety of Back-Channel Expressions**

In all ten conversations (150 minutes in total), 114 different forms of BC expressions are observed<sup>15</sup>. Table 11 shows the twelve most frequently occurring BC tokens in BC expressions for each group. As seen in the table, these twelve BC expressions form the majority of total BC expressions that appear in the collected data.

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<sup>15</sup> One of the NSs, NS10a, speaks a Kansai dialect which has different forms from those used in the standard Japanese with regard to BCs. In order to allow a generalisation in the analysis, forms correspondent to the standard Japanese, mainly final particles, rather than the actual forms she produced were taken into consideration in the analysis.

**Table 11. The 12 most frequently used BC expressions in each group**

Frequency (Number of people used)

L			N			NS		
BC tokens			BC tokens			BC tokens		
1	<i>n :</i>	216 (5)	<i>n :</i>	253 (5)	<i>n :</i>	502 (10)		
2	<i>æ</i>	34 (5)	<i>æ</i>	49 (5)	<i>n : &lt;rep&gt;</i>	122 (7)		
3	<i>soo</i>	33 (5)	<i>n : &lt;rep&gt;</i>	34 (5)	<i>huun</i>	55 (7)		
4	<i>hee</i>	18 (4)	<i>hee</i>	29 (3)	<i>æ</i>	39 (10)		
5	<i>soo &lt;rep&gt;</i>	10 (4)	<i>huun</i>	22 (5)	<i>soo nanda</i>	32 (8)		
6	<i>n : &lt;rep&gt;</i>	7 (4)	<i>honto ni</i>	21 (5)	<i>honto ni</i>	31 (7)		
7	<i>huun</i>	7 (4)	<i>soo &lt;rep&gt;</i>	17 (3)	<i>honto</i>	30 (4)		
8	<i>honto</i>	6 (3)	<i>honto</i>	11 (2)	<i>soo &lt;rep&gt;</i>	26 (6)		
9	<i>n : soo&lt;rep&gt;</i>	5 (1)	<i>soo dane</i>	9 (3)	<i>soo dayone</i>	24 (5)		
10	<i>sugoi</i>	4 (3)	<i>ii ne</i>	9 (3)	<i>hee</i>	21 (5)		
11	<i>soo desu ne</i>	4 (1)	<i>soo</i>	9 (2)	<i>ne</i>	18 (7)		
12	<i>ee</i>	4 (1)	<i>n : hun &lt;rep&gt;</i>	9 (2)	<i>soo</i>	17 (6)		
<b>total</b>		<b>348</b>	<b>total</b>		<b>472</b>	<b>total</b>		<b>917</b>

<rep> indicates that the form is repeated identically more than once.

The total number of occurrences for the twelve tokens is 348 in the L group. This makes up 91.8% of the total BC expressions produced by Ls, which marks the highest proportion amongst the three groups. In the case of the N group and the NS group, the twelve most frequently used BC expressions constitute 78.1% and 86.1% of the total BC expressions, respectively. The most frequently occurring BC expression is *n:* for all groups, being used by all twenty participants. In all the groups, the six tokens, *æ*, *n: <rep>*, *huun*, *soo*, *hee*, and *honto*, are used relatively frequently.

Table 12 shows BC expressions which are used at least once by more than half of the participants in each group. This indicates the variety of BC expressions which are used in common by the three groups with respect to the number of people used. The order of variety of BC expressions is shown as: N > NS > L. The widest variety of BC tokens are observed in the BC expressions produced by Ns. There are fifteen different BC expressions used by more than half of Ns. In the case of NSs, thirteen different expressions are observed. Ls use the lowest variety of BC expressions, i.e. nine different expressions. These results indicate that a lower variety of commonly used BC expressions is observed for the L group compared with native speakers.

**Table 12. BC expressions used by more than half of the participants in each group**

	<b>L</b>	<b>no. of</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>no. of</b>	<b>NS</b>	<b>no. of</b>
	<b>Tokens</b>	<b>people</b>	<b>Tokens</b>	<b>people</b>	<b>Tokens</b>	<b>people</b>
1	<i>n :</i>	5	<i>n :</i>	5	<i>n :</i>	10
2	<i>aa</i>	5	<i>aa</i>	5	<i>aa</i>	10
3	<i>soo</i>	5	<i>n : &lt;rep&gt;</i>	5	<i>soo nanda</i>	8
4	<i>hee</i>	4	<i>huun</i>	5	<i>n : &lt;rep&gt;</i>	7
5	<i>soo &lt;rep&gt;</i>	4	<i>hontoni</i>	5	<i>huun</i>	7
6	<i>n : &lt;rep&gt;</i>	4	<i>soo da yone</i>	4	<i>hontoni</i>	7
7	<i>huun</i>	4	<i>sokka &lt;rep&gt;</i>	4	<i>ne</i>	7
8	<i>honto</i>	3	<i>hee</i>	3	<i>soo &lt;rep&gt;</i>	6
9	<i>sugoi</i>	3	<i>soo &lt;rep&gt;</i>	3	<i>soo</i>	6
10			<i>soo da ne</i>	3	<i>soo da ne</i>	6
11			<i>ii ne</i>	3	<i>soo da yone</i>	5
12			<i>sooka / sokka</i>	3	<i>hee</i>	5
13			<i>a ::</i>	3	<i>ii ne</i>	5
14			<i>ii na</i>	3		
15			<i>soo ne</i>	3		
<b>9 tokens</b>			<b>15 tokens</b>		<b>13 tokens</b>	

(Total number of people: the L group-5; the N group-5; the NS group-10)

Two expressions, *n :* and *aa*, are produced by all twenty participants. Apart from these, BC expressions used by all the members in each group are *soo* for the L group, and *n: <rep>*, *huun* and *hontoni* for the N group. There are no BC expressions that are used by all NSs except for *n:* and *aa*. BC expressions used by more than half of the participants for all three groups are *hee*, *soo <rep>*, *n: <rep>*, and *huun*. As Table 12 shows, not all BC expressions that are used in common in each group correspond to each other. For example, *soo* is used by more than half of Ls and NSs, but not by Ns. In addition, there are four tokens used by more than half of Ns and NSs, but not by Ls. These are *hontoni*, *soodayone*, *soodane*, and *iine*. Furthermore, there are some BC expressions which are used in common by certain groups but not by other groups. For example, *honto* and *sugoi* are used by more than half the people in L group, and *sokka <rep>*, *soo dane*, *sooka/sokka*, *a::*, *iina* and *soone* in the case of the N group. *Soonanda*, *ne*, and *soodane* are produced by more than half NSs, but not by other groups.

So far, we have considered BC expressions which are used relatively frequently. Next, the number of varieties of BC expressions that appear in the collected conversations will be observed.

The number of different BC expressions that appear at least once in each group is shown in Table 13, regardless of their frequency of use. Thirty-three different BC expressions are observed in the BCs produced by Ls, which is the lowest figure

within the three groups. NSs use the widest variety of BC expressions, i.e. 73 different tokens. There are 69 different BC expressions observed in the case of the N group.

**Table 13. Total number of varieties of BC expressions used by each group**

<b>L</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>NS</b>
<b>33 tokens</b>	<b>69 tokens</b>	<b>73 tokens</b>

Table 14 shows the number of different BC expressions produced by each participant within a fifteen-minute conversation. On average, Ns produce a much wider range of BC expressions, i.e. 24.8 different tokens for a fifteen-minute conversation, per person. Ls produce the lowest number, i.e. 12.8 tokens. The NS group is located between the L and N groups, i.e. 18.4 tokens.

**Table 14. Variety of BC expressions for each participant**

<b>L 1</b>	<b>L 2</b>	<b>L 3</b>	<b>L 4</b>	<b>L 5</b>	<b>mean</b>
14	8	16	14	12	<b>12.8 tokens</b>
<b>N 1</b>	<b>N 2</b>	<b>N 3</b>	<b>N 4</b>	<b>N 5</b>	<b>mean</b>
28	30	17	27	22	<b>24.8 tokens</b>
<b>NS6a</b>	<b>NS7a</b>	<b>NS8a</b>	<b>NS9a</b>	<b>NS10a</b>	<b>mean</b>
18	20	8	19	25	<b>18.4 tokens</b>
<b>NS6b</b>	<b>NS7b</b>	<b>NS8b</b>	<b>NS9b</b>	<b>NS10b</b>	
25	9	17	29	14	

It should be noted that this result is not consistent with the results from the total number of different BC expression tokens produced by each group (cf. Table 13). Recall that the results for the total number of tokens indicate that the NS group uses the widest variety of tokens (cf. Table 13). This may be due to the difference in the number of people contained in each group. That is, the wider variety of total BC expressions produced by NSs in the previous results (cf. Table 13) may be due to the fact that more people are included in the NS group.

What is more important with regard to the results presented in Table 14 is that there is a great difference between the average number of tokens for the N group and the NS group, i.e. 24.8 tokens for Ns and 18.4 for NSs. This may indicate that native speakers change their usage of BCs depending on whether they are talking to learners or native speakers. However, it is also possible that the more variety of expressions produced by Ns may be due to the fact that they use more BC turns, i.e. 144.6 BC turns for the N group and 129.9 for the NS, and thus had more opportunities to produce greater varieties of BC expressions. This issue requires a further examination to determine whether the wider variety used in the N group is due to the speech adjusted for the learners or simply due to the matter of opportunity. Again, the results suggest that there is a possibility that native speakers adjust their style of back-channelling and use wider variety of BC expressions when conversing with learners.



In Section 5.2.1, we have investigated the variety of BC expressions used focusing on the quantitative aspect. In summary, learners are found to use a lower variety of BC expressions than do native speakers. The following two facts are deemed to be the reasons for this fewer variety of BC expressions used by learners.

First, learners have not acquired sufficiently the many varieties of BC expressions, and thus do not possess as wide variety of BC expressions as native speakers do. Another conceivable explanation is that, as seen in the analysis of frequency, learners produce fewer BC turns, and thus have fewer opportunities to produce various BC expressions.

### **5.2.2. Forms of Back-Channel Expressions**

It was shown in Section 5.2.1. that learners have a smaller variety of BC expressions compared with native speakers. In order to investigate what in particular is different in the variety of BC expressions, BC expressions used by learners and native speakers must be examined in more detail. For convenience of the analysis of the varying forms of BC expressions, all the identified BC expressions are sorted into types that have common features. Basically, the various brief elements attached to the initial position, such as *a*, *aa*, *e*, etc., and final particles contribute to distinguishing the member expressions that belong to the same type. Whether a token

occurs singly, e.g. *soo*, or in repeated form, e.g. *soo soo*, also makes a significant difference. Moreover, a remarkable difference can be observed in the ending forms of variants between certain BC expression types used by learners and those used by native speakers. This difference is crucial to determining the learners' lower variety of BC expressions. Thus, in this section (5.2.2.), we will first investigate the forms of BC expressions in reference to their ending forms, particularly focusing on several types of BC expressions which display notable differences between learners and native speakers. The focus will be firstly on six types of lexical BC expressions, i.e. 'soo-type', 'honto-type', 'sugoi-type', 'ii-type', 'taihen-type', and 'iya-type'. These types represent BC expressions which contain 'soo', 'honto', 'sugoi', 'ii', 'taihen', and 'iya' respectively. Among these, *soo*-type forms the largest group in terms of the number of variants represented. For convenience of the analysis and discussion, 'sugoi-type', 'ii-type', 'taihen-type', and 'iya-type' will be referred to as lexical exclamatory expressions. Then, a group of non-lexical exclamatory expressions, e.g. *a: : , e: : , o: : , etc.*, will be observed.

Let us first take a look at some types of the lexical BC expressions focusing on the ending forms. Table 15 presents the various endings observed in *soo*-type expressions, and the number of people who use these expressions. The bold numbers in the table indicate that the items are used by more than half of the people in the group. The *soo*-type expressions are used by all twenty participants. There are five

different endings observed in BCs expressions of this type in the L group. There are nine different endings in the N group and ten in the NS group.

**Table 15. Endings of the *soo* -type expressions**

	L	N	NS
<b>Total (people)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>soo+</b>			
Ø	5	3	9
(desu) ka	3	4	7
da/desu ne	2	3	6
dayone	0	4	5
ne	1	3	0
nanda	0	2	8
nano	0	2	2
desho	0	2	0
jan ne	0	0	2
desuyo	1	0	0
nanda yone	0	1	0
nanoka	0	0	1
da	0	0	1
kana	0	0	1

Simple *soo*, which is represented by *ø*, and *soodesuka/sooka*, represented by *(desu)ka*, are used by more than half the people in all three groups. *Soodane/soodesune* and *soodayone* are used by more than half of the native speakers, i.e. both Ns and NSs. As for *soodayone*, none of the learners use this. *Soone* is used by more than half the N group, and *soonanda* by more than half the NS group. Out of fourteen different endings of the *soo*-type, only two are used by more than half the learners. In contrast, there are five endings used by more than half the Ns and NSs. Five tokens are used at least by one person in the L group, i.e. nine

in the N group, and ten in the NS group. To summarise, Table 15 indicates that there are less variety of tokens in the *soo*-type used by learners than by native speakers.

The distribution of endings for expressions represented as the *honto*-type is shown in Table 16.

**Table 16. Endings of the *honto* -type expressions**

	L	N	NS
<b>Total (people)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>honto+</b>			
∅	3	2	4
ni	0	5	7

More than half of the participants in each group produce *honto*-type expressions. It should be noted that there is a clear difference in the use of expressions of this type. That is, all three learners who produce *honto*-type BCs use *honto*, while there are no learners who use *hontoni*. Conversely, *hontoni* is produced by all of those native speakers who display *honto*-type expressions. *Honto* is used by a fewer number of native speakers compared to *hontoni*. Again, the results show a clear difference in preference in the use of the *honto*-type expressions. That is, native speakers are more likely to use *hontoni* than *honto*, whereas learners do not produce *hontoni* at all.

Let us now turn to observe lexical exclamatory expressions, e.g., *sugoi*, *iine*, etc. Evaluative expressions refer to four different types of lexical expressions, i.e. *sugoi*-

type, *ii*-type, *taihen*-type, and *iya*-type. Table 17 shows four types of lexical exclamatory expressions and the distribution of ending forms of their variants.

**Table 17. Lexical exclamatory expressions**

	L	N	NS
<b>total (people)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>sugoi+</b>			
∅	3	3	4
ne	0	2	3
na	0	2	1
yone	0	1	0
jan	0	1	0
<b>total (people)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ii+</b>			
(desu) ne	2	3	5
na	0	3	2
yo	0	0	1
<b>total (people)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>taihen+</b>			
dane	0	1	0
na	0	1	0
<b>total (people)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>iya+</b>			
∅	0	0	1
da	0	0	1

In addition to the expressions listed in the table, there is one more lexical exclamatory expression observed, *kowai*. This is used by a NS only once, and thus will not be included in the discussion for convenience. The results reveal that learners use only simple forms of lexical exclamatory expressions, i.e. *sugoi*, *ii*, while native speakers

produce them with a greater range of endings. It should be also noted that the two types of lexical exclamatory expressions, i.e. *taihen*-type and *iya*-type, are not used by learners at all.

The *sugoi*-types are used by more than half the people in all groups, i.e. three Ls and three Ns, and six NSs. While all the three learners use only *sugoi*, there are five different endings which are observed in the N group, and three different endings in the NS group. Out of these three Ns who produce tokens of the *sugoi*-type, one N use only one token: *sugoi*. The other two Ns produce three or four tokens. Among the six NSs who use BC expressions of this type, four NSs use only one of these endings: *sugoi* for three NSs and *sugoine* for one NS. The other two NSs produce two different tokens of this type. That is, there are two Ns and NSs who use more than one different token of this type.

With regard to the *ii*-type expressions, two Ls and more than half of Ns and NSs, i.e. four Ns and NSs, use this type of expressions. Similar to the case of the *sugoi*-type, only one token of this type, *iidesune*<sup>16</sup>, is used by learners. There are two Ns who use only one of these expressions, and the rest of the Ns use expressions with two different endings. As for NSs, three NSs used only one ending, and two NSs two different endings. One NS uses expressions of this type with three different endings. As for the *taihen*-type and the *iya*-type, each type is used by two Ns and by two

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<sup>16</sup> *Iidesune* and *iine* are regarded as the same tokens as the difference between them is in the level of politeness, i.e. whether or not *desu* is attached.

NSs (cf. Table 17). Each of these two Ns use one of the two tokens, either *taihendane* or *taihenna*, and each of these two NSs use either one of *iya* or *yada*.

So far, we have observed varying forms of BC expressions used by learners and native speakers focusing mainly on the ending forms of the variants for several types of lexical expressions, i.e. *soo*-type, *honto*-type, *sugoi*-type, *ii*-type, *taihen*-type, and *iya*-type. In regard to these types of lexical expressions, the results indicate a remarkable difference in the number of the variety of endings between learners and native speakers. What is interesting is that some of these endings are used as BCs simply on their own. These are the final particle, *ne*, three combinations of final particle and copula such as *dane*, *dayone/dayona*<sup>17</sup>, and the auxiliary form, *desho*. It is worth noting that these BC expressions are not used by learners at all but used by more than half of the native speakers, i.e. four Ns and seven NSs (cf. Table 18).

**Table 18. Simple ending forms**

	L	N	NS
<b>Total (people)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>
ne	0	2	7
dane	0	1	0
dayone/dayona	0	1	3
desho	0	1	0

<sup>17</sup>*Dayone* and *dayona* are treated as the same tokens as the distinction is simply based on a gender difference in their usage.

As shown in Table 18, *ne* is observed most frequently and used by nine out of 15 native speakers. *Dayone* is used by three native speakers, and *dayone/dayona* by two. *Desho* is used by only one participant. The use of these expressions by native speakers points out the importance and frequent use of the various endings, such as final particles, in Japanese BC usage.

Let us now turn to a group of non-lexical expressions. Great differences are observed in the use of non-lexical exclamatory expressions used by learners and by native speakers. As seen in Table 19, there are nine non-lexical exclamatory expressions observed in total, i.e. *a::*, *a:a*, *e::*, *o::*, *o::n*, *ha*, *ha::*, *uwa*, and *arararara*.

**Table 19. Non-lexical exclamatory expressions**

	L	N	NS
Total (people)	1	5	8
a::	0	3	3
a:a	0	0	1
e::	1	1	4
o::	0	1	2
o::n	0	1	0
ha	0	1	0
ha::	0	1	2
uwa	0	0	1
arararara	0	0	1

The number of people who use these expressions at least once in a conversation is one L, all five Ns, and eight NSs. Out of the nine expressions, there are four expressions which are used by more than one participant. These are *a::* , *e::*, *o::* , and



*ha::*. Again, it is remarkable that there is only one learner who uses this type of expression while these expressions are used by most of the native speakers, i.e. all Ns and eight out of ten NSs.

The results from our observation indicate that the less variety of learners' BC expressions is due mainly to the fewer varieties of endings of BC expressions they use. Therefore, it is suggested that the formal aspect of the learners' BC usage in terms of the variety of BC expressions will be developed by encouraging to use a wider range of endings. To increase the variety of BC expressions, learners are also suggested to use non-lexical exclamatory and simple endings. These expressions, as we have seen, are rarely used by learners while they are used by many of the native speakers.

The use of various BC expressions is encouraged as it is deemed to allow the listener to show more involvement and an active participation in the conversation. If the listener keeps using the same BC tokens in conversation, the speaker may think that the listener is bored or uninterested in the talk. Moreover, the speaker may be discouraged from continuing to talk. This unpreferred usage of a single token can be seen in the following.

- (14) N:      ato (..) sono ma hitori : (.) de sumu    no    hajimete dakara :,  
                  and    well           alone           live    Nom   first-time because  
                  'and, well, because it is my first time living by myself,'

- L: un  
uh huh  
'Uh huh.'  
(..)
- N: sono (.) hon- so- (.) eigo (.) hitasura eigo nomi (.)  
well English only English only  
tte iu koto kangae reba ii kedo :,  
QT say thing think if good but  
'well, I think (homestaying) is good if I think only about  
learning English ,'
- L: n :  
uh huh  
'Uh huh.'
- N: ma (.) hitoride seikatsusuru toka?  
well alone live or  
'well, (if I think about) things like to live by myself,'
- L: n [ :  
uh huh  
'Uh huh.'
- N: [sooiu koto mo kangaeru to:  
such thing also consider if  
'if I think about these things'
- L: n :  
uh huh  
'Uh huh.'
- N: ryoo (.) ryoo mo ne (.) iroi[ro (.) atarashii  
dormitory dormitory also FP various new  
koto aru kara,  
thing there are because  
'(I can experience) new things if I live in a dormitory, so'
- L: n :

uh huh  
‘Uh huh.’  
N: .hhh (....) soo ne : :  
so FP  
‘well...’

Preceding to the above talk, N states that he probably should have chosen a homestay to improve his English. In this segment, N is saying that he thinks at the same time, that it is good for him to live in a dormitory. In fact, this is the last part of a rather long stretch of talk where N is mainly the speaker. In this long talk, L produces many BCs. However, these BCs lacks variety, which consist mainly of *n*: and head nods, especially in this last segment. This rather long talk ends with N exhaling, which is then followed by a long pause, and a change in topic. L's simple BCs gives the impression of a passive or even of an uninterested listener. Indeed L simply allows the speaker to continue talking. After all, N change the topic by asking L a question, which resulted in the speaker change.

(15) NSb: hokkaidoo mo basho ni yoru ka na :.  
Hokkaido also place on depend Q FP  
‘It depends on the place in Hokkaido, I guess.’  
(.)

- NSa : huu [ : n  
I-see  
'I see.'
- NSb : [demo : nan daroo nantoka dabe ya:  
but what Tag something  
tte iu no wa,  
QT say Nom Top  
'But, well, as for (expressions) such as "dabeya",'
- NSa : n : [ tsukatteta?  
yeah was using  
'Yeah, were you using that (expression)?'
- NSb : [n :  
yeah  
'Yeah.'
- NSb : tsukatteta yo.  
was-using FP  
'I was saying (that).'
- NSa : huu : n  
I-see  
'I see.'
- (.)
- NSb : a ore moo (.) nihon daigaku i- sendai iru toki mo : ,  
ah I Japan university Sendai be when also  
'Ah, when I was in Japan, university, in Sendai,'
- NSa : n :  
uh huh  
'Uh huh.'
- NSb : nanka minna hoogen, nanka toohokujin  
like everyone dialect something Toohoku-people  
ooi jan yappari,  
many Tag after-all

- ‘well, everyone dialect, well, there are many people from  
Toohoku, you know,’
- NSa : n : n : =  
uh-huh  
‘Uh huh.’
- NSb : =demo minna naze ka matomona kotoba tsukatte kkara: ,  
but everyone why Q proper language is using because  
‘but I don’t know why, but everyone was using the standard  
language, so,’
- NSa : a soo na n da :  
ah so Cop Nom Cop  
‘Oh, is that so?’

(C7)

This is a segment from a talk about a dialect in Japan. NSb is the speaker and NSa the listener. NSa is producing a relatively wider variety of BCs compared with the listener in the previous example (14), as we observed. NSa does not continue to use the same token repeatedly. Not only does the listener produce different tokens, NSa also asks a brief question, *tsukatteta?*, which suggests her interest in the speaker’s talk. In fact, this brief question has made the speaker talk more about things related to the topic in mention. The speaker develops his talk in accordance with the BCs and reaction generated from the listener. Therefore, if BCs from the listener lack variety, the speaker would be unsure how to develop his or her talk.

In Section 5.3, we will examine the use of head nods, which are frequently observed throughout the conversational data.

### 5.3. HEAD NODS

In the collected data, head nods are the second most frequently occurring BCs. They are produced 1553 times by all three groups in total, including those produced both with and without verbal BCs<sup>18</sup>. As mentioned previously, there are two types of head nods observed in the conversational data. These are single head nods and repeated head nods. A 'single' head nod refers to the movement of the head up and down, or vice versa. If such movements are repeated, they are referred to as 'repeated' head nods.

It should be noted that head nods are produced not only by the listener but also by the speaker. There is a report which shows that a speaker's head movements are one of the contexts in which BC occurs (Maynard 1989). Thus, speaker's head nods are considered important in that they tend to attract BCs from the listener. However, as this study is concerned with head nods which serve as BCs, we should focus on head nods given by the listener.

The following points will be examined in relation to head nods: (i) distribution of head nods with and without verbal BCs, and (ii) the form of occurrence, i.e. whether repeated or single.

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<sup>18</sup> Those head nods which are immediately followed or preceded by verbal BCs are regarded as co-occurring with verbal BCs.

Table 20 shows the number of head nods for each participant, highlighting the occurrence or non-occurrence of verbal BCs. The N and NS groups produce a higher number of head nods, 82.6 for N and 81.6 for NS, whereas the L group produces 64.8 on average.

**Table 20. Head nods with and without verbal BCs**

	L 1	L 2	L 3	L 4	L 5	total	mean
with	35	77	71	37	34	254 (78.4%)	50.8
without	7	15	27	6	15	70 (21.6%)	14
total	42	92	98	43	49	324	64.8

	N 1	N 2	N 3	N 4	N 5	total	mean
with	96	27	62	73	89	347 (84%)	69.4
without	3	6	27	27	3	66 (16%)	13.2
total	99	33	89	100	92	413	82.6

	NS6a	NS7a	NS8a	NS9a	NS10a
with	37	76	36	60	102
without	1	15	10	19	23
total	38	91	46	79	125

	NS6b	NS7b	NS8b	NS9b	NS10b	total	mean
with	125	46	67	77	22	648 (79.4%)	64.8
without	48	6	36	7	3	168 (20.6%)	16.8
total	173	52	103	84	25	816	81.6

On the whole, the total number of head nods for each participant appears to vary, even amongst the members within each of the three groups. The table also shows that native speakers produce a relatively higher number of head nods than Ls do. This may be related to the fact that learners tend to play the speaker’s role in conversation, as we have already observed in the analysis of frequency (cf. Section

3.3.). That is, the fewer number of head nods produced by learners is deemed to be due to the fewer opportunities given to produce head nods.

In considering head nods in terms of whether or not they are accompanied by verbal BCs, all the participants produce a much greater number of head nods with verbal BCs than without. In total, Ns produce head nods with verbal BCs at higher rate compared to Ls and NSs, though individual differences are also observed.

Table 21 shows the number of occurrences of single and repeated head nods.

**Table 21. Single and repeated head nods**

frequency								
	L 1	L 2	L 3	L 4	L 5	total		mean
single	3 0	1 8	3 5	1 0	4	97	(29.9%)	19.4
repeated	1 2	7 4	6 3	3 3	4 5	227	(70.1%)	45.4
total	4 2	9 2	9 8	4 3	4 9	3 2 4		64.8
	N 1	N 2	N 3	N 4	N 5	total		mean
single	6 1	1 7	6 9	9	1 7	173	(41.9%)	34.6
repeated	3 8	1 6	2 0	9 1	7 5	240	(58.1%)	4 8
total	9 9	3 3	8 9	1 0 0	9 2	4 1 3		82.6
	NS6a	NS7a	NS8a	NS9a	NS10a			
single	2 9	2 7	2 1	5 1	6 0			
repeated	9	6 4	2 5	2 8	6 5			
total	3 8	9 1	4 6	7 9	1 2 5			
	NS6b	NS7b	NS8b	NS9b	NS10b	total		mean
single	1 2 2	3 1	8 6	3 4	1 7	478	(58.6%)	47.8
repeated	5 1	2 1	1 7	5 0	8	338	(41.4%)	33.8
total	1 7 3	5 2	1 0 3	8 4	2 5	8 1 6		81.6



Four out of five Ls tend to produce more repeated head nods than a single head nod. However, in the case of native speakers, two Ns and four NSs produce more repeated head nods, which is less than half of all native speakers. The table thus indicates that learners tend to produce more repeated head nods, while native speakers show more individual differences in the use of single or repeated head nods.

There are some points to note in regard to the use of head nods. Firstly, concerning the preference of repeated head nods for the L group, L2 and L5 tend to employ long lasting slight head nods. These head nods sometimes give a negative impression. That is, on occasions, such long slight head nods appear to display the listener's boredom with the talk, rather than encouragement for the speaker to talk. This is not problematic if the listener intends to display such a message. However, if the listener does not have this intention, it is problematic, and it may lead to a negative outcome. In contrast, it seems that giving brief repeated head nods or a single clear head nod is more likely to encourage the speaker to continue talking on the topic. Secondly, in the L group, some head nods are observed when the listener does not understand the content of the speaker's talk. In such cases, head nods are normally slow and unaccompanied by verbal BCs. Such head nods seem to imply that the listener allows the speaker continue talking to wait for a while instead of initiating a repair. Finally, head nods may be linked to eye movement. In the process of analysing head nods, head nods are found to become bigger when the listener makes eye contact with the

speaker. This may imply the listener's intention to show that he or she is an active listener.

#### **5.4. SUMMARY**

In this chapter, we have observed forms of BC tokens used by learners and native speakers. First, the distribution of the four types of BC tokens, i.e. BC expression, repetition, cooperative completion, and head nods, is observed. The results show that BC expressions are dominant in the use of BCs in all the three groups. Our detailed observations of variety of BC expressions indicate that learners use a lower variety of BC expressions than native speakers. To be more specific, native speakers produce BC expressions with endings of various final particles and grammatical elements, while learners use BC expressions with a smaller varieties of endings. This implies that learners may be able to increase the variety of BC expressions by using more varieties of endings, e.g. final particles. However, increasing the variety of tokens by adding various final particles may not be simple to achieve since final particles are, in general, considered to be one of the most difficult items for learners to use appropriately.

The results also indicate that the use of head nods varies between individuals. However, there are some common tendencies. All the participants produce more head

nods with verbal BCs than those without verbal BCs. Further, learners produce more repeated head nods than single head nods when compared with native speakers.

## **Chapter 6**

# **FUNCTION OF BACK-CHANNELS**

## **6.0. INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter Six, we focus on the functional aspects of BCs. In Section 6.1, I will consider two major functions of BCs: (i) simple acknowledgement and (ii) display of the listener's attitude. The former is the function of which the listener simply acknowledges his or her receipt and/or understanding of the speaker's talk. The latter is the function of which the listener displays his or her attitude toward what the speaker said. This will be followed by an analysis of the functional aspects of BC usage by learners and native speakers in the collected conversations. The analysis will reveal that a clear difference exists in the quality of BCs used by learners and native speakers. It will be shown that learners produce a higher percentage of simple acknowledgements and a lower percentage of attitudes compared to native speakers. The difference is statistically significant.

## 6.1. IDENTIFICATION OF FUNCTION OF BACK-CHANNELS

BCs identified in our conversational data can be assigned one of the following functions: (i) simple acknowledgement— simply acknowledge the listener's receipt and/or understanding of the speaker's talk, and (ii) attitude— display the listener's attitude toward what the speaker said. A difference between these two functions is illustrated in the following segment of conversation.

- (16)        NSb : ne : . atashi datte        bureeku no ;,  
                 FP    I        because break    Gen  
                 'Yeah. Because in the middle of the break,'  
→        NSa :    n :  
                 uh huh  
                 'Uh huh.'
- NSb : mannaka ga    essei no    teishutsu dakara ;,  
                 middle    Sub essay Gen due-date    because  
                 'I have to hand in an essay, so'  
→        NSa :    ho : nto ni?=  
                 really  
                 'Really?'
- NSb : =zenhan        wa ;,  
                 the first half Top  
                 'for the first half of the break,'  
→        NSa :    n  
                 uh huh  
                 'Uh huh.'
- NSb : benkyoo shinasai tte kanji de  
                 study    do        QT        Cop-and

‘I have to study, and,’

(C9)

In this conversation, NSb, the speaker, is saying that she has an essay due in the middle of a forthcoming break, and so she has to study for the first half of the break. NSa, the listener, is giving BCs toward the NSb’s talk. Let us first look at the first and the third BCs, i.e. *n:* and *n*. These BCs simply acknowledge that the listener has heard what the speaker said and that the speaker should continue talking. However, the second BC, i.e. *ho:ntoni?*, is somewhat different from these two BCs, i.e. *n:* and *n*. It displays the listener’s surprise or emotional reaction rather than simply acknowledging that he or she is listening to the speaker. Accordingly, the first and the third BCs, i.e. *n:* and *n*, have the function of simple acknowledgement while the second BC, i.e. *ho:ntoni?*, has the function of display of the listener’s attitude.

As illustrated by the above examples, existence of the listener’s attitude towards the speaker is crucial in distinguishing between these two functions, i.e. simple acknowledgement and attitude, namely whether a BC simply acknowledges the receipt of the speaker’s talk and no more than that, i.e. simple acknowledgement, or in addition to this, a BC displays what the listener feels about what the speaker said, i.e. attitude.

The distinction between these two types of BCs is also found in some works (Goodwin 1986; Jefferson 1984; Maynard 1989; for example). For example,

Goodwin (1986) proposes the difference between ‘continuers’ and ‘assessments’, e.g. ‘uh huh’ for the former, and ‘oh wow’ for the latter, etc. Maynard (1989:171) proposes the following functions of BCs in Japanese: (i) continuer, (ii) display of understanding of content, (iii) support toward the speaker’s judgement, (iv) agreement, (v) strong emotional response, and (vi) minor addition, correction, or request for information. Maynard notes that these functions overlap and it is understood that BCs perform more or less of these proposed functions. In our analysis of functional aspects of BCs, the distinction between the two functions, i.e. simple acknowledgement and attitude, is focused in order to avoid a confusion in investigation by minimising the number of functions being focused and overlaps between them.

As will be illustrated, the two functions adopted by the current study cover several sub-categories such as continuer, display of understanding of content, assessment, agreement, etc.

The following sub-sections, 6.1.1. and 6.1.2, discuss the functions of simple acknowledgement and attitude in more detail with some examples.

### 6.1.1. Simple Acknowledgement

Again, ‘simple acknowledgement’ is assigned to those BCs with which the listener simply acknowledges the speaker that he or she has heard and/or understood what the speaker said and no further than this. This function includes continuers and displays of the understanding of the content of what the speaker said. An example of continuers is shown in (17).

(17) NSa: n: hatsuon wa muzukashikunai kamoshirenai. (.)

yeah pronunciation Top not-difficult may

‘Yeah, pronunciation may not be difficult.’

nanka (.) n: sugoi tanchoo dashi:,

something yeah terribly monotonous Cop-and

‘Well, it’s very monotonous, and’

→ NSb: n:

uh-huh

‘Uh huh.’

NSa: .hh de tango mo ne:, .hh tokidoki eigo ni

and vocabulary also FP sometimes English to

niterushi:,

similar-and

‘and sometimes words (in Spanish) are similar to English words.’

→ NSb: n:

uh-huh

‘Uh huh.’

(.)

NSa: n:, demo anmari benkyo shitenai kara



yeah but not-much study not-doing because  
 anmari ie[nai.  
 not-much cannot-say  
 ‘Yeah, but I cannot say much because I wasn’t studying  
 much.’

NSb: (((laugh))  
 (C8)

In (17) above, NSa is talking about the Spanish language, which she was studying at a university in Japan as a second foreign language. This conversational segment is preceded by NSa saying that the reason why she chose Spanish is because she was told that Spanish is not difficult as it is similar to English and the pronunciation is easy. This is followed by NSb’s question about whether or not what NSa was told is true. NSa answers this question in this conversational segment. NSb is giving brief BCs, i.e. *n:*, which are followed by NSa’s continuation of her talk. Such BCs, i.e. continuers appear in the midst of extended turn and signal the speaker to continue talking.

Let us now consider BCs which show the listener’s understanding of the content of the speaker’s talk in the following examples, i.e. (18), (19), and (20). Example (18) is a case where such BCs appear at the midst of the speaker’s talk.

- (18) NSa: ↑doo na n daroo ne:, demo nanka (.) inaka ni  
 how Cop Nom Tag FP, but something country-side in  
 iru to:, [nanka terebi toka no joohoo shika

be if like TV or Gen information only

'I have no idea. But if I'm in the country side, well, because I  
can only have information from the TV or something,

NSb: [n:  
uh-huh  
'Uh huh.'

NSa: shiranai kara? (.) [n : , nanka tookyoo tte  
not-know because yeah like Tokyo QT  
'so, yeah, (I thought that) Tokyo must be,'

→ NSb: [aa : :  
ah  
'Ah.'

NSa: zettai abunai tokoro da to omotte[ta kedo:  
definitely dangerous place Cop QT was thinking but  
'a dangerous place, I thought (like that), but,'

NSb: [((laugh)) (C7)

NSa and NSb are talking about living in Tokyo. NSa has been to university in Tokyo and had been living there for three years before she came to Australia. Preceding this segment of conversation, NSa is asked what it is like to live in Tokyo. NSa answers that she found out that living in Tokyo is better than expected. In this segment, NSa is saying that when she was in her hometown she was thinking that Tokyo must be a dangerous place because she only had information about Tokyo from the television. While NSa is talking, NSb is producing two BCs, which are *n:* and *aa::*. Compared with the first BC, i.e. *n:*, the second BC, i.e. *aa::*, displays the listener's understanding of what the speaker said rather clearly.

The following is an example of BCs which appear after a repair of some problem of hearing or understanding, or after a clarification request or a follow-up question.

- (19)        N:    =ano ne ittsumo ne: (..) asokoni iru        yo (.)  
                 well FP always FP        there    there-is FP  
                 rife- rife-kutorii?  
                 refectory  
                 ‘Well, (we) are always there, refe- refectory?’  
             L:    no (..) ue?        ka [shita,  
                 Gen upstairs or downstairs  
                 ‘Upstairs or downstairs?’  
             N:                                [uun shita.  
   no downstairs  
   ‘No, downstairs.’  
→        L:    shita.  
                 downstairs  
                 ‘Downstairs.’
- (C1)

When N says that she usually sees one of her friends at the refectory, L asks for more detailed information asking if the place they meet is upstairs or downstairs. Then N provides an answer, which is followed by L’s BC, a repetition of part of the answer. By repeating the answer of the question, L is acknowledging that N’s turn has been heard and understood, and thus is finished.

The example (20) presents a BC which acknowledges that the listener has understood what the speaker said and that the listener will start speaking. Such BCs are produced at the transition points where a speaker change occurs.

- (20)        NSa :        [n : dakara tabun kaeri sanjuppun kurai  
                               yeah so maybe way back 30 minutes about  
                               kakaru n janai no ka na : .  
                               take Nom Tag Nom Q FP  
                               ‘Yeah, so it will probably take about thirty minutes to go back  
                               home, I guess.’
- NSb :    n : . a watashi ne einzurii no hoo mada itta  
                               I-see ah I FP Ainslie Gen direction not yet went  
                               koto nakutte : ,  
                               fact not-and  
                               ‘I see. Ah, I haven’t been to Ainslie yet, and,’
- NSa :    n :  
                               uh huh  
                               ‘Uh huh.’

(C6)

Preceding this segment of conversation, NSb asks NSa if Canberra is flat. This is followed by NSb’s answer that the way to her house is a gentle ascent and therefore the way back is a little bit hard to go by a bicycle. At the beginning of this segment, NSb is the speaker and is saying that it will probably take thirty minutes to go back home. Following this, NSa produces a BC, *n :*, and then starts her speaking turn by introducing a topic that does not directly related to the preceding talk. Production of this BC, i.e. *n :*, indicates that the listener has heard and understood what the speaker

said, had enough of the topic, and now he or she will start talking on a new topic. Those BCs, such as the *n::* in conversation (20), which immediately precede the new speaking turn of the listener who produces the BCs, may be seen as being produced by a speaker and thus are not BCs. However, these are regarded as BCs as they are the behaviour of the listener at the time of production, acknowledging the speaker's turn, and these vocalisations themselves do not constitute speaking turns.

So far, we have observed some examples of BCs which function as simple acknowledgements. In Section 6.1.2, we will discuss cases of BCs which display the listener's attitude rather than simply acknowledging.

### 6.1.2. Attitude

The function of attitude is assigned to those BCs which show how the listener feels about the speaker's talk. These can take the form of expressions such as showing interest, agreement, emotional responses, etc. The conversation (21) is an example of BCs which shows interest to the speaker's talk, i.e. 'topicalizer'.

- (21) L: >demo:< (.) kyanbera yori motto samui yo.  
           but           Canberra than much-more cold FP  
           'But it is much more colder (in Tasmania) than in Canberra'

- N: honto ni[:,  
really  
'Really.'
- L: [n: maa .hh yoru wa (.) sonnani  
yeah well night Top not-much  
samuku wa [nai kedo:, ano .hh (.) soo ne: (.) a: no: kyanbera  
not- cold Top not but well so FP well Canberra  
'Yeah, well, it is not much cold at night, but, well,'
- N: [n:  
uh-huh  
'Uh huh.'
- L: no hoo ga ano hi ga- hi ga deru kara  
Gen Sub well sun Sub sun Sub appear because  
'there is more sunlight in Canberra, so,'
- (C4)

In the above example, L is talking about Tasmania. When L says that Tasmania is much colder than Canberra, N gives a BC, *hontoni:*. This BC indicates the listener's interest in what the speaker said and in being told more, and thus encourages the speaker to talk more on the topic. Indeed, this BC, *hontoni:*, is followed by more talk by the speaker on the topic about the weather in Tasmania.

The BC in (22) displays the listener's agreement to what the speaker said.

- (22) NSb: nanka sore tte, .hh torareru (.) no o  
like it QT taken Nom Obj  
'Well, that is,'

- NSa: n:  
uh-huh  
'Uh huh.'
- NSb: booshisuru tame ja nakutte, [anmari  
prevent in-order-to not-and not-much  
'not to prevent from getting stolen, and
- NSa: [tabun  
maybe  
'Maybe.'
- NSb: imi nai yo ne,=  
reason there-is-not FP FP  
'there isn't much use, isn't there?'
- NSa: =tabun=  
maybe  
'Maybe.'
- NSb: =sore da to datte kirare tara  
that Cop if because be-cut if  
owari daka[\$ra:\$  
finish because  
'Because if (the key) is cut, that's it, so.'
- NSa: [soo soo soo soo [soo  
so so so so so  
'Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah'.
- NSb: [jibun ga mendokusai yo ne  
oneself Sub troublesome FP FP  
'It's just troublesome, isn't it?'
- (C6)

In the above conversation, i.e. example (22), NSa and NSb are talking about NSa's bicycle key which NSa is complaining of. NSb makes a rather long comment about

the key, saying that the key is not very useful for protecting the bicycle from being stolen. During the NSb's talk, NSa produces two BCs, i.e. *n:* and *soosoosoosooso*. While the first BC, i.e. *n:*, is no more than a simple acknowledgement showing that the listener is listening, the second BC, i.e. *soosoosoosooso*, exhibits the listener's attitude that she agrees to what the speaker is saying, which is more than simply showing that she has heard and understood.

The following example demonstrates those BCs which show a relatively strong attitude on the listener's part toward what the speaker said, compared with the aforementioned cases, i.e. showing interest and agreement. These BCs exhibit the listener's evaluation of the speaker's talk.

- (23) L: *n:*, maa hoka no guruupu toka ↓*n:* sesshoku  
 yeah well other Gen group or yeah contact  
 shite: (.)°*n:*° tatoeba shoorinjikenpuu  
 do-and yeah for-example Shaolin-temple-patterns  
 toka o [narat tari,  
 or Obj learned or  
 'Yeah, well, I contact with other groups, and, well, for  
 example, I learned Shaolin-temple-patterns, and,'
- N: [\$a: sugoi\$  
 ah great  
 'Oh, great.'

(C4)



In this conversational data, L is talking about what she did when she was in Japan. When L says that she learned Shaolin-temple-patterns, N produces a BC, *a: sugoi*. By producing this BC, the listener assesses the speaker's talk and indicates that what the speaker said is something remarkable, i.e. "assessment" (see Goodwin 1986 for a detailed discussion on the distinction between assessments and continuers).

In Section 6.1, we have considered functions of BCs as: (i) simple acknowledgements and (ii) attitudes. For the remainder of this chapter, BCs produced by learners and native speakers in the collected conversations are examined and discussed in terms of these functions.

## **6.2. FUNCTIONS OF BACK-CHANNELS USED BY LEARNERS AND NATIVE SPEAKERS**

Either one of the two functions explained above, i.e. simple acknowledgement or display of attitude, is assigned to all BC tokens identified in the collected conversations, except head nods. The majority of head nods appear to serve as simple acknowledgements, and thus the focus will be on verbal BCs in this analysis.

Table 22 shows the number of BC tokens and the percentages of each function. All twenty participants produce more simple acknowledgements than attitudes. The

groups of native speakers, i.e. the N and NS groups, present the similar distribution of these functions, i.e. 71.7% and 72.3% for simple acknowledgements and 28.3% and 27.7% for attitudes respectively. Compared to native speakers, learners produce a higher percentage of simple acknowledgements and lower attitudes (cf. Figure 5).

**Table 22. Functions of BCs**

frequency (%)

	<b>L 1</b>	<b>L 2</b>	<b>L 3</b>	<b>L 4</b>	<b>L 5</b>	<b>total</b>
simple ack.	58(84.0)	91(88.3)	99(84.6)	50(83.3)	54(80.6)	<b>352(84.6)</b>
attitude	11(16.0)	12(11.7)	18(15.4)	10(16.7)	13(19.4)	<b>64 (15.4)</b>
total	69	103	117	60	67	<b>416</b>

	<b>N 1</b>	<b>N 2</b>	<b>N 3</b>	<b>N 4</b>	<b>N 5</b>	<b>total</b>
simple ack.	135(67.8)	78(71.6)	84(77.1)	81(66.9)	116(76.8)	<b>494(71.7)</b>
attitude	64 (32.2)	31(28.4)	25(22.9)	40(33.1)	35 (23.2)	<b>195(28.3)</b>
total	199	109	109	121	151	<b>689</b>

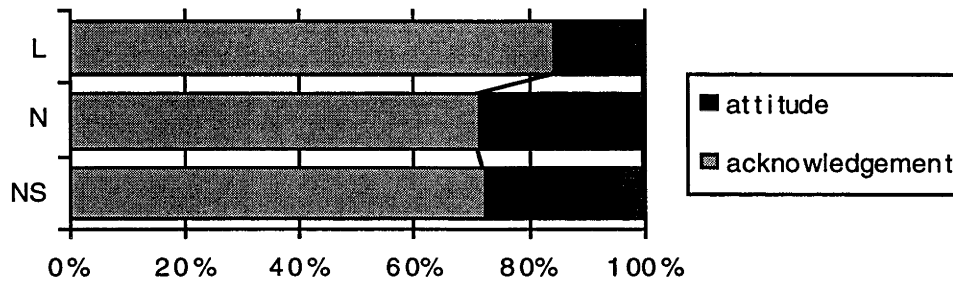
  

	<b>NS6a</b>	<b>NS7a</b>	<b>NS8a</b>	<b>NS9a</b>	<b>NS10a</b>
simple ack.	46(61.3)	120(77.4)	34(77.3)	100(82.0)	108(65.1)
attitude	29(38.7)	35 (22.6)	10(22.7)	22 (18.0)	58 (34.9)
total	75	155	44	122	166

	<b>NS6b</b>	<b>NS7b</b>	<b>NS8b</b>	<b>NS9b</b>	<b>NS10b</b>	<b>total</b>
simple ack.	147(69.3)	66(76.7)	71(74.7)	126(70.0)	37(77.1)	<b>855(72.3)</b>
attitude	65 (30.7)	20(23.3)	24(25.3)	54 (30.0)	11(22.9)	<b>328(27.7)</b>
total	212	86	95	180	48	<b>1183</b>

**Figure 5. Function of BCs**



Chi-square test (Table 23) reveals the difference in the functions of BCs used by learners and native speakers to be significant ( $\chi^2=27.47$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p< .001$ ). Again, learners' BCs contain a significantly higher percentage of simple acknowledgements and lower percentage of attitudes compared with those of native speakers.

**Table 23. Frequency of the BCs of each function produced by learners and native speakers**

Observed frequency				Expected values			
	Learners	Native speakers	total		Learners	Native speakers	total
ack.	352	1349	1701	ack.	309.27	1391.73	1701
att.	64	523	587	att.	106.73	480.27	587
total	416	1872	2288	total	416	1872	2288

Chi-square=27.47,  $df=1$ ,  $p< .001$

Furthermore, the results for individuals show that all learners produce a higher percentage of simple acknowledgements and a lower percentage of attitudes than all native speakers, except NS9a who produces the lowest percentage of attitudes among native speakers, i.e. 18%. Figures 6a and 6b show the percentage of simple

acknowledgements and attitudes respectively for each participant in ascending order. These figures indicate that a high portion of simple acknowledgements and a low portion of attitudes is clearly a common tendency observed in learners' BCs.

Figure 6a. Simple acknowledgements

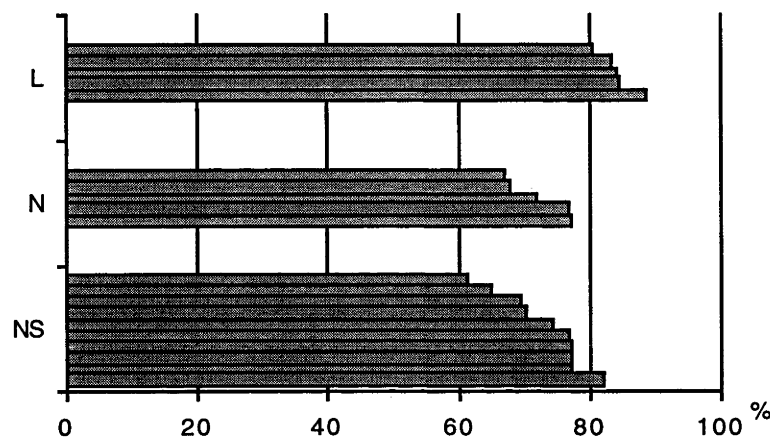
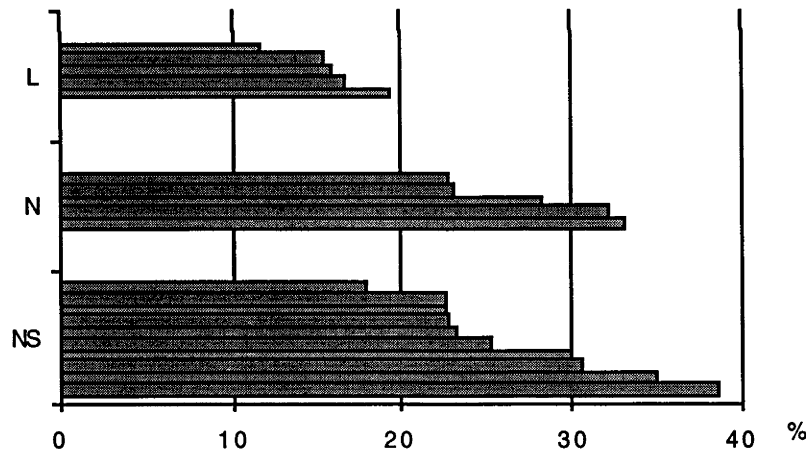


Figure 6b. Attitudes



Above, we have investigated functions of BCs produced by learners and native speakers. The results have revealed a significant difference in the quality of BCs used by learners and native speakers in terms of their function. Learners tend to produce

more BCs with the function of simple acknowledgement and fewer BCs with that of attitude. In contrast, BCs produced by native speakers contain fewer simple acknowledgements and more attitudes.

Let us finally consider what these results imply. As noted previously, BCs provide the listener with a means to participate actively in conversation (Duncan & Fiske 1977). On the basis of this perspective, the two functions of simple acknowledgements and attitudes are assumed to indicate different degrees of the participant's involvement in conversation as the listener. That is, BCs with the function of attitude show a greater involvement of the listener than those of simple acknowledgement. This is because attitudes exhibit the listener's stronger response to what the speaker said than a simple response which shows a receipt of the speaker's talk.

Recall that learners exhibit a higher percentage of attitudes compared with native speakers. This indicates that learners participate in a conversation less actively when playing the listener's role than do native speakers. Furthermore, the higher portion of attitudes in native speakers' BCs implies that BCs in Japanese conversation are used in such a way to show more attitude on the listener's part toward what the speaker said, e.g. showing interest, agreement, etc. Therefore, if there is an expectation that the listeners should produce BCs in such a way, the difference observed in the function of BCs between learner and native speakers needs to be acknowledged as

being crucial. Such a difference in the use of BCs might become a potential problem in cross-cultural communication. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

### **6.3. SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the use of BCs has been analysed in terms of their functional aspects. The results indicate that there is a difference in the quality of BCs used by learners and native speakers. BCs produced by learners contain a significantly low percentage of BCs with the function of attitude compared with those produced by native speakers. It is deemed that learners, compared to native speakers, are less actively involved in a conversation when they are playing the role of listener.

## **Chapter 7**

# **IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING BACK-CHANNELS**

### **7.0. INTRODUCTION**

In this study, BCs used by learners and native speakers have been analysed in terms of their frequency, location, form, and function. Significant differences in BC usage between learners and native speakers are observed in the formal and functional aspects: learners use less variety of BCs, and do not express attitude toward what the speaker said as much as native speakers do when producing BCs. There are, however, some similarities observed in the aspects of frequency and location of BCs. That is, learners produce BCs as frequently as native speakers do. Further, there are no major differences observed in the placement of BCs. In general, both learners and native speakers tend to produce BCs

at places which are grammatically complete, or at the lexical, phrasal, and clausal boundaries which are marked by some grammatical elements.

In this chapter, the following points will be discussed on the basis of the above findings:

- (i) the Japanese BC usage in relation to Japanese culture and communication style, and
- (ii) some pedagogical implications for teaching BC usages to learners of Japanese language.

## **7.1. JAPANESE CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION STYLE AND BACK-CHANNEL BEHAVIOUR**

Japanese culture values highly the maintenance of harmony. Maynard (1997a:54) notes, “many sociological and anthropological studies on Japan have suggested that the Japanese behave in such a way as to express greater sensitivity to the surrounding context, including the participants and their views toward each other”. Such a feature of Japanese culture is clearly reflected in Japanese BC usage. As mentioned in Section 1.2.2, several researchers point out that frequent use of BCs in Japanese is a characteristic of Japanese conversational style and is related to Japanese cultural aspects which value maintaining smooth and harmonious social interaction (for example, LoCastro 1987; Maynard 1986; White 1989). In addition to this, the findings of the current study



suggests that such a cultural value is reflected also in the qualitative aspects of Japanese BC usage. This suggestion is supported by the fact that native speakers tend to display how they feel about what the speaker said when producing BCs. Furthermore, various final particles observed in the native speakers' BCs suggest that Japanese BCs display the listener's concern to the speaker, as final particles contribute to communication to be achieved "in an emotional and empathy-creating-way (Maynard 1997b)". Therefore, again, in Japanese communication styles, the listener is expected to display his or her sensitivity to the speaker by producing BCs frequently and, more importantly, by producing BCs with the quality which shows the listener's attitude. This should be recognised as a crucial feature in the Japanese BC usage, and needs to receive a special attention in the setting of cross-cultural communication.

## **7.2. THREE IMPORTANT SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING JAPANESE BACK-CHANNELS**

This study focuses on BCs used by advanced learners. All learners in this study have been to Japan for more than one year. These learners have interacted with Japanese native speakers in their daily life during their stay in Japan, although the degree may vary (see Section 2.1.1, for details of participants including learners). The results from the analysis of BC usage by these learners implies that not all aspects of BC usage have been

acquired naturally through interaction with native speakers. Therefore, there is a necessity for the instruction of BC behaviour in the classroom.

In the remainder of Section 7.2, I will suggest some pedagogical implications for teaching BCs based on the findings of this study. Although the suggestions are mainly targeted for advanced learners, they are considered to be instructive to learners at other proficiency levels.

First of all, we should raise learners' awareness to the difference in styles of Japanese BCs from those in the learners' native language. This should be a first step, as such difference, otherwise, may not be noticed. In particular, we should emphasise the functional aspect of BC usage in Japanese, recognising that Japanese listeners tend to display their attitude of willingness to cooperate and empathise with the speaker's talk when producing BCs. This is particularly important, as differences in the qualitative aspect of BC usage are assumed to be more difficult to notice than the quantitative aspect.

Furthermore, BC usage should be taught in conjunction with the culture that underlies it. This is important since BC usage is closely related to cultural context where the language is used, especially in the case of Japanese as discussed in the previous section (7.1).

Differences in communication style between different cultures may cause misunderstandings in cross-cultural settings. Difference in style is one of the major reasons why native speakers of Japanese perceive learners' use of BCs as somewhat inadequate, and thus problematic. Recall that one of the major differences in BC usage between learners and native speakers is observed in the functional aspects of BCs. That is, learners do not display their attitude as much as native speaker do when using BCs. Conversely, the results show that learners produce BCs as frequently as native speakers do, which indicates that the qualitative aspect of BC usage has been already acquired. Therefore, it is assumed that the native speakers' negative impressions about learners' BC usage may be partly due to the fact that the quality of learners' BCs are different from what is expected in Japanese conversation. This indicates the need to encourage learners to develop the qualitative aspects of their BC usage.

Another suggestion is to assist learners to expand the variety of their BCs. It was shown in Chapter Five that a remarkable difference is observed in the formal aspect of BCs between learners and native speakers. Learners use fewer BC expressions while native speakers use a number of different BC expressions. Another finding in reference to the variety of BC expressions is that there is no problem for learners to use basic forms of many BC expressions, e.g. *soo*, *honto*, *sugoi*. The problem is that learners do not sufficiently use variants of these basic forms. Thus, it is expected that the smaller variety

of expressions used by learners will be improved by increasing the variants of those BC expressions which learners are already using.

In accomplishing this, the use of final particles appears to be crucial. As noted earlier, the importance and frequent use of final particles in Japanese BCs are indicated by the group of expressions of simple endings such as *ne*, *dane*, *dayone*, etc. (cf. Section 5.2.2.). These expressions are used in common by native speakers but not by learners. There is also another group of such expressions that are common to native speakers but not to learners. This is the group of non-lexical exclamatory expressions, such as *a ::*, *e ::*, *o ::*, etc. It is thus suggested that these groups of expressions should be included as items which are stressed in teaching BCs.

Up to now, some pedagogical implications have been discussed on the basis of the results obtained in this study. The major suggestions I have made so far are: (i) to raise learners' awareness to the importance of BC usages in Japanese, (ii) to develop the functional aspects, and (iii) the formal aspects of learners' BC usage.

The formal and functional aspects are closely related to each other. Improving the formal aspects of learners' BC usage may also lead to improvement in the functional aspects. This is, first, because the use of final particles themselves contribute to show the listener's attitude. As Maynard (1989:28) says, the frequent use of final particles

“encourages rapport between the conversation partner and achieves a closer monitoring of the partner’s feeling”. Thus, the use of more BCs with final particles is deemed to allow learners to show more involvement with the speakers’ talk and active participation in the conversation. Second, it is noted that learners use few non-lexical exclamatory expressions. Encouraging learners to use these expressions contributes directly to increasing the number of such BC expressions that express how the listener feels in relation to the speaker’s talk. Finally, displaying various BC expressions may allow the listener to appear as an interested listener who is willing to participate in the conversation and encourage the speaker to talk. Monotonous succession of BCs possibly provides the speaker with the impression of a less active listener who does not cooperate in the development of the conversation. For the reasons discussed above, it is deemed that developing the formal aspects of BC usage results in a greater contribution to the development of the functional aspect of BC usage.

### **7.3. THREE IMPORTANT POINTS IN TEACHING JAPANESE BACK-CHANNELS**

In Section 7.3, I will discuss some important points regarding the suggestions for teaching BCs. First, it is necessary to ensure that learners use final particles appropriately. Otherwise, the effect of BCs will decrease. Furthermore, inappropriate

usage of final particles may impede the flow of conversation. Final particles are generally considered to be subjectives which learners find difficult to acquire. Second, BC timing is important. Timing here does not refer to the location in relation to structural aspects, but to the context relevant to the speaker's expectation. It is also important for the listener to use BCs which are expected by the speaker. They should be relevant to the context. The following segment of a conversation between a learner and a native speaker is an example of the timing and expectation issues.

- (24) L: Y ((name)) wa? kazoku wa?  
 Y Top family Top  
 'How about you? Your family?'
- N: kazoku wa tookyoo?  
 family Top Tokyo  
 'My family is in Tokyo.'
- L: n :  
 uh-huh  
 'Uh huh.'
- N: de: (.) itshuukan mae : >a ja nai ya< (..) kin-  
 and one-week ago ah not FP Fri-  
 honto wa ne:, konai- senshuu no : ,=  
 actually Top FP last-week Gen  
 'and a week ago, no, actually, last week,'
- L: = n : =  
 uh-huh  
 'Uh huh.'
- N: kinyoobi made : (..) nihon ni ita no ne,

Friday    until    Japan in was FP FP  
 'I was in Japan until last Friday.'

→ L:    n hu  
          uh-huh  
          'Uh huh.'

         (..)

      N:    soide : (..) kaette       kita.  
              and               return-and    come  
              'and I came back.'

         (..)

→ L:    >a soo<  
              ah so  
              'I see.'

      N:    n :  
              uh-huh  
              'Uh huh.'

→ L:    hee  
              huun  
              'Huun.'

(C4)

In this conversation, N is stating that she was in Japan and came back last Friday. L reacts to this talk by producing BCs. Look at (24). After N's BC *n hu*, during the short pause, shown as (..), L and N are nodding at each other. N's talk that she returned recently from Japan, which is expressed in this segment, is something worth receiving an attention of the listener as an interesting topic. Thus, N appears to have expected a

response from the listener that the listener shows interest in being told more on this topic. But L does not give such a response, and instead simply utters *n hu*, which serves no more than as a continuer. The more appropriate alternatives would be something like *honto?* ‘really?’ or *e soo nano?* ‘oh, is that so?’. The pause after this BC, i.e. *n hu* can be considered as a sign that N is unable to receive the reaction that N expected. This makes N unable to smoothly continue the conversation, and thus N gives head nods before N starts her talk again. Such head nods are thought to be produced in order to have a moment to find further expressions or in order to break the silence. At the end of N’s talk, L gave a BC, *a soo*, and then *hee*. *A soo* acknowledges L’s receipt of the speaker’s talk. *Hee* appears to show L’s surprise and interest in the speaker’s talk. This BC, showing her attitude, encourages the speaker to talk more. Accordingly, the speaker continues her turn after this BC, giving the listener a reason for her return to Japan.

In short, in this conversation, the listener produces BCs at the expected positions, but the quality of BCs is different from those expected by the speaker. This conversation indicates that timing is important in terms of appropriateness for both the place and quality expected from the speaker.

Finally, it should be noted that the use of BCs is influenced by a number of factors. For example, BC usage changes considerably depending on social factors such as the settings of the conversation (formal or casual, for example), or the relationship between the



participants (talking to a friend or to a teacher, for example)<sup>19</sup>. Such variations in BC usage need to be acknowledged in teaching BC. This is particularly important in relation to the appropriate usage of BCs in the varying conversational contexts which learners encounter.

To summarise, in this section, I have mentioned some points which need to be taken into account in teaching BC usage. They are: (i) to ensure learners to use final particles appropriately, (ii) to use appropriate BCs at appropriate timing in relation to the speaker's expectation, and (iii) to acknowledge the variations in BC usage.

#### **7.4. SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the findings of this study have been discussed in reference to the Japanese cultural background, which is highly motivated to show sensitivity to others. Some implications for teaching BCs have also been suggested based on the findings. The first is to raise learners awareness to one of the most important aspects of Japanese BC usage, which is that the listener shows his or her cooperation and empathy to the speaker's talk when using BCs. The second is to develop the functional aspect of

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<sup>19</sup> The factors which influence the BC usage are intensively discussed in a number of works (For example, Komiya 1986; Kurosaki 1987; Mizutani 1988a). I recommend that readers refer to these work for detailed discussions as this issue is not directly related to our investigation.

learners' BC usage. It is important to encourage learners to produce more BCs which show the attitude on the listeners' part to the speakers' message. Finally, it is suggested that learners increase their variety of BC expressions. Developing more formal aspects also leads to the development of the functional aspects of BC usage. There are some points with which we need to be concerned in teaching BCs, such as the appropriate use of final particles, timing, and variations in BC usage.

## CONCLUSION

The brief vocalisations produced by the listener while the speaker is talking are called back-channels (BCs). BCs are necessary for a smooth flow of conversation and contribute greatly to the development of the speaker's talk. BCs are a universal behaviour which can be observed in any language. However, what is important is that their usage differs among different cultures and speech communities. In the cross-cultural settings, communication misunderstandings can occur due to the differing BC usage between different cultures.

In Japanese language teaching, the necessity of teaching proper BC usage to learners is often emphasised. I have discussed the importance of teaching BCs in reference to the following two points, (i) the listener's contribution to the conversation, and (ii) the cultural differences in the BC usage. Learners' inappropriate usage of BCs is reported by studies on the BCs used by learners. For the further understanding of learners' BC usage, more empirical studies on BCs used by learners are necessary.

The current study has attempted to investigate learners' BC behaviour and to suggest implications for teaching Japanese BCs to learners. In the remainder of the

conclusion, I will summarise the major findings of this study and some implications for teaching BCs.

BCs produced by learners and native speakers in ten fifteen-minute conversations are analysed, i.e. five L-N conversations and five NS-NS conversations. Four BC types are identified prior to the analysis, i.e. BC expressions, repetitions, cooperative completions, and head nods. BC usage by learners and native speakers are found to be different qualitatively rather than quantitatively.

The analyses of frequency and location do not show great differences in BCs used by learners and native speakers. Observations of the frequency of BCs indicate that the fewer number of BCs produced does not necessarily mean the less frequent use of BCs. Therefore, on the basis of the result for the number of syllables per BC turn, learners are found to produce BCs as frequently as native speakers do. As for the location of BCs, learners produce BCs either at boundaries that are grammatical completion points or at those marked with grammatical elements as do native speakers. On the whole, learners produce BCs constantly throughout a conversation as do native speakers.

Major differences are observed in the formal and functional aspects. The results obtained from the analysis of BC expressions revealed that learners use less variety of BC expressions compared with native speakers. To be more specific, native

speakers use BC expressions with various endings while learners use BC expressions with a smaller variety of endings. The functional aspects of BC usage are analysed focusing on the functions of simple acknowledgement and display of attitude. The results indicate that learners produce a significantly low percentage of BCs with the function of attitude compared with native speakers. This implies that learners participate in conversation less actively when they are playing the role of the listener. Furthermore, the higher portion of attitude in the native speakers' BCs implies that the listener shows how he or she feels about what the speaker said when producing BCs in Japanese conversation.

It is often claimed that the frequent use of BCs in Japanese conversation is related to the Japanese culture that values maintaining smooth and harmonious social interaction. The findings of the current study suggest that qualitative aspects as well as the quantitative aspects of BC usage reflect such Japanese cultural value.

On the basis of our findings and observations of the learners' BC usage, I have presented three major suggestions for teaching BCs. First, we should raise the learners' awareness to an important aspect of Japanese BC usage, that is, to show the listener's cooperation and empathy to the speaker. Second, learners are suggested to develop the functional aspects of BC usage. To be more specific, learners should be encouraged to produce more BCs which show their attitude to what the speaker said. Third, learners are suggested to increase the variety of BC expressions.

In addition to these suggestions, I have also highlighted some points which are important and need to be taken into account in teaching BCs. These are: (i) the appropriate use of final particles, (ii) the appropriate timing in relation to the speaker's expectation, and (iii) variations in the BC usage.

This study has investigated BC usage by learners and native speakers of the Japanese language in order to obtain some implications for teaching BCs. I hope that findings and suggestions presented throughout this study would advance the present understanding of BC behaviour and the teaching of BCs in the Japanese language.

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